

新修版

金庸

作品集 20

# 連城訣

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三朵黃  
蕊上  
的花瓣  
落了錢  
花下來  
連城訣之牢獄  
法新

全世界人的共同語言

金

# **A Deadly Secret**

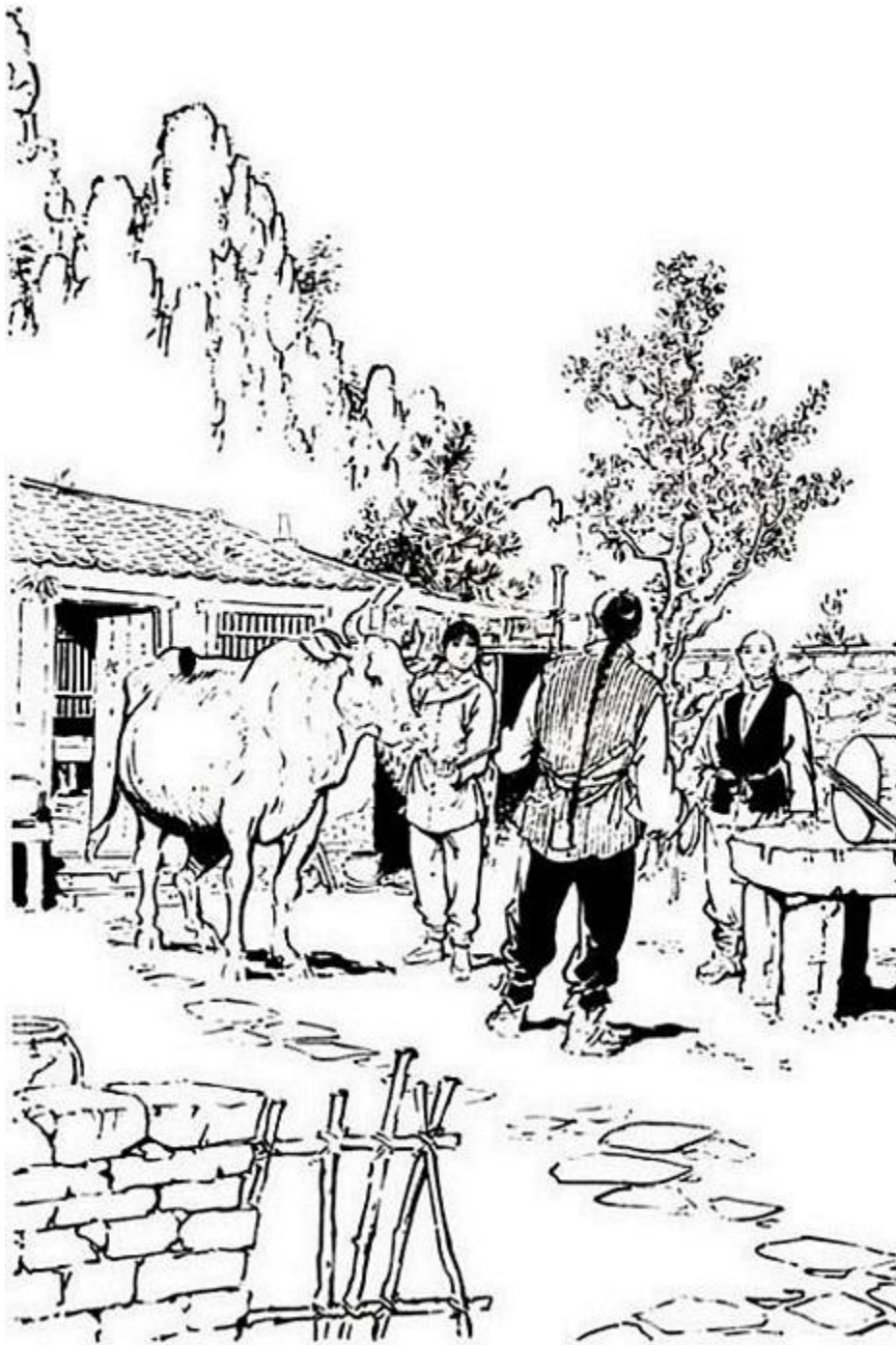
**Story by Jin Yong**

**Translated by devilz91**

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## Chapter 1 – The Countrymen Enter the City



*"I won't let go! If you sell it to someone else, they will kill him and eat him, I can't bear it."*

## A Deadly Secret

*Tuo! Tuo Tuo Tuo! Tuo! Tuo Tuo!*

Two wooden swords clashed with intense force, emitting rattling sounds. Sometimes there were intermissions between collisions, while other times the swords collided quite fiercely.

This was the village of Maxi located in the Yuanling province in Western Hunan. On the field outside a three-room cottage, a young man and woman were practicing their sword skills. In front of the cottage, an old man was sitting on a small stool, biting on a very thin tobacco pipe while weaving straw sandals with his hands. Occasionally, he would look up at the young pair fighting and give a faint smile of acknowledgement. The sunlight illuminated the pale grey smoke exhaled from his mouth. The old man had a head full of white hair; his face was quite wrinkled, but whenever he exhaled a breath of smoke, his eyes would be filled with energy. In fact, he wasn't really that old, no more than 50 years of age.

The girl was about 17 or 18 years old. She had a round face and big black eyes. When she felt tired and sweat filled her forehead, there would be a streak of sweat streaming down on her left cheek and flowing down her neck. She would wipe off the sweat with her left sleeve. Her cheeks were red like a string of red peppers hung under the eaves of a cottage. The young man she was sparring with was about two or three years older than her; his face was long and dark, his cheekbone was high, and he had rough hands and big feet. Although he was a typical peasant in the countryside, the wooden sword in his hand was handled quite dexterously.

Suddenly, the young man slashed downwards from the left, retreated slightly, and unleashed a direct strike with his sword. The young girl avoided the attack by lowering her head, but the sword kept thrusting at her with strong and rapid momentum. The young man backed off two steps, swung the wooden sword out, and then with a loud cry, swept the sword horizontally three times. The girl had kept her opponent in check until now, but at this point she withdrew her sword and stood still, defenseless.

"I guess you're good, okay?" she scorned. "Just kill me!"

The young man had not anticipated that she would suddenly retract her sword without defending, so his third strike nearly cut her waist. He tried to relinquish his attack at once, but the force of the strike was already emanated, and with a loud clap, the sword hit himself on the back of his left hand and he let out a slight cry of pain.

The girl applauded and laughed. "Aren't you ashamed? If that was a real sword, do you think your hand would still be in tact?"

There were traces of redness on the man's dark face. He replied: "I was afraid I would cut you, otherwise I would not have hurt myself. In a real fight, do you think I would really go easy on you like that? Teacher, why don't you be the judge?" As he said his last word, he looked over to the old man.

The old man was still holding a half-finished straw sandal, but now stood up and said: "The two of you have fought well for about 50 stances or so, but the later stances were executed poorly." From the young girl's hand he grabbed the wooden sword, positioned himself in a fighting stance and continued, "This technique 'Brother Weng Shouts Up' followed by the technique 'Dare not Cross the Horizontal' should be executed horizontally, not straight. A'fang, in regards to your two techniques

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‘The Wind Suddenly Blows’ and ‘The Mountain Escapes Like a Cloth’; the image of your sword should look like a bolt of cloth running away. A’yun’s two techniques ‘Falling Mud Welcomes Big Sister’ and ‘The Horse Blows a Little Wind’ were executed decently, but the latter technique is called ‘A Little Wind’ and you put too much strength into your strike. This swordplay has a famous name in the martial world, it is called the ‘Reclining Corpse Swordplay’. With every stance, the essence is to make your opponent recline like a dead body. Since we are only sparring in good spirit, there is no need to be so serious, but the ‘reclining corpse’ part of the name must be remembered to heart.”

“Father, our swordplay is very good, but the name of the swordplay isn’t... isn’t very good,” the young girl remarked. “Reclining Corpse Swordplay sounds scary.”

The old man replied: “You can say that it is scary, but it is also equally impressive. Before the battle even begins, your opponent is already struck with fear.” He was still holding the wooden sword, and demonstrated those six techniques to the young pair. His sword movements appeared quite heavy yet regressed lightly at the same time; it was actually very deadly and powerful. The young man and woman admitted their inferiority and applauded. The old man then gave the sword to the young girl and said, “The two of you should keep practicing these stances. A’fang, don’t always think about fooling around. If your elder martial brother did not go easy on you, do you think you would still be alive?”

The girl stuck out her tongue, and suddenly stroke out with her sword in rapid speed. The young man was caught off guard and immediately tried to defend with his own sword, but the young girl got the initiative of striking first and continued attacking in a continuous motion. The young man could find no way of counterattacking. Suddenly, the sounds of horseshoes were heard approaching from the northeast direction; a horse made its way to the cottage.

The young man turned around and said, “Who could that be?”

The girl retorted: “You lost, don’t make up excuses. What does it matter to you who is coming?” And with another three continuous strokes the girl attacked while the young man tried hard to defend.

The young man became annoyed and said: “Just take it that I’m afraid of you, okay?”

The young girl smiled. “You say you aren’t afraid, but you really are.” She executed a stance with a stroke on the left and a stroke on the right, both techniques were quite dexterous.

At that time the rider had already reined his horse and shouted: “‘The Sky Flowers Fall Endlessly, The Birds Fly Everywhere!’ Excellent!”

The young girl let out an interjection of surprise and jumped backwards to face the rider. She saw that the man was about 23 or 24 years of age and dressed in elegant attire, most likely a man from a rich family from the city. She could not help but blush a bit, and spoke softly, “Father, how... how does he know?”

The old man heard the equestrian speak out the name of his daughter’s two techniques she had just executed and felt surprised as well. At this moment, the equestrian wished to consult with them, so he got off his horse and said: “If I may ask this elder, in Maxi there is a renowned swordsman by the name of ‘Iron Lock Across the River’ Qi Zhangfa, do you know where he lives?”

"I am Qi Zhangfa," the old man replied. "The title of renowned swordsman I do not dare to receive. May I ask why you are looking for me?"

The young man kowtowed and said: "Your junior Bu Yuan greets Uncle Qi. I come on behalf of my teacher to visit you."

"No need for such salutations," Qi Zhangfa replied. He helped the young man up with his hands. A strong energy was felt when they made contact. Bu Yuan felt a slight numbness on half his body and his face flushed red.

"Uncle Qi must be testing junior," Bu Yuan remarked, "our first meeting and I have already been embarrassed."

Qi Zhangfa smiled and replied: "Your internal energy is a bit lower than that of my students. Which disciple of Brother Wan are you?"

Bu Yuan's face flushed red again and answered: "Junior is teacher's fifth unsuccessful student. Teacher often mentions that Uncle Qi's internal energy is profound, how else would you be able to provoke junior so easily?"

Qi Zhangfa laughed heartily and asked: "How is Brother Wan doing? We old brothers have not seen each other in over ten years."

"Thanks to elder's fortune, my teacher is well. Those two martial siblings, are they elder's disciples? Their sword techniques are profound!"

Qi Zhangfa made a hand gesture and said: "A'yun, A'fang, come see your Brother Bu. This is my disciple Di Yun, and this is my daughter Ah Fang. Oh, countrywoman, there is nothing to be shy of, we are of the same family." Qi Fang hid behind Di Yun and gave a faint smile.

Di Yun asked: "Brother Bu, are your sword techniques from the same school as ours? Otherwise, how could you identify my martial sister's technique with just one glance?"

Qi Zhangfa spat out some phlegm and remarked: "Your teacher and his teacher are from the same clan, of course we would be learning the same sword techniques, is there any reason to ask?"

Bu Yuan lifted the cloth next to the saddle and produced a bag. He presented it with both hands and said: "Uncle Qi, teacher said this is a small gift, please accept it." Qi Zhangfa expressed his thanks and told his daughter to put it away.

Qi Fang brought it inside the room and opened the bag. Inside the bag was a gown made of a brocade of sheep fur, a gem wrist bracelet, a felt hat, and a black coat. Qi Fang took it out, laughed and said: "Father, you have never worn such beautiful clothing, if you wear this, how would you look like a countryman? People will think you became a rich government official."

Qi Zhangfa gave a glance at it and could not help but chuckle. After a moment, he timidly said, "Brother Wan... this... haha... this is really..."

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Di Yun went to the front of the village to fetch three catties<sup>1</sup> of white wine while Qi Fang went to slaughter a chicken. She placed it in the middle amongst some Chinese cabbage and other vegetables altogether in a pot. There was also another big bowl of red pepper in the fluid. The four of them were sitting together at the dining table.

Qi Zhangfa asked for the reason for the visit, and Bu Yuan replied: “Teacher said he hasn’t seen Uncle Qi in over ten years and misses him dearly. He thought of visiting Henan personally, but because teacher is busy practicing the Liancheng Swordplay every day he could not find any leisure time...”

Qi Zhangfa put the bowl of wine beside him, and suddenly spat out the mouthful of wine he just downed. “What? Your teacher is practicing the Liancheng Swordplay?” he quickly asked.

Bu Yuan’s expression was complacent. “On the fifth of the last month, teacher has already completed his training of the Liancheng Swordplay.”

Qi Zhangfa felt even colder. All of a sudden, he slammed the bowl of wine on the table. More than half the bowl of wine spilt out as a result, causing his clothes and the table to be flooded with wine. He sat motionless for a while, and then suddenly burst into laughter. He tapped his hand on Bu Yuan’s shoulder and said: “Damn that brat, your teacher has always been known to exaggerate such things. Even your grand-teacher could not complete the Liancheng Swordplay; your teacher’s lies aren’t very well-thought. Don’t deceive your uncle anymore... let us drink...” And with that he finished off the remaining half of his wine, while he grabbed a hot red pepper with his left hand and chewed on it.

Bu Yuan’s face showed no hint of laughter. Instead, he continued: “Teacher knew that Uncle Qi would not believe him. On the sixteenth of next month, it is teacher’s 50th birthday. May Uncle Qi bring his disciples with him to Jingzhou for some wine. Teacher specifically told junior to come visit to request Uncle to come at any cost. Teacher said that there are some spots in the Liancheng Swordplay that he has not yet perfected and would like to discuss with Uncle. Teacher has always said that Uncle’s sword techniques were profound. If my martial brothers and I could receive some advice from Uncle, we would definitely show significant progress.”

“Has your Second Uncle Yan Daping already been invited?” asked Qi Zhangfa.

Bu Yuan replied: “Second Uncle Yan Daping wanders around leisurely, teacher has already sent Second Brother, Third Brother, and Fourth Brother to search around Henan, Jiangnan, and Yungui, but we have not found him yet. Does Uncle Qi know the whereabouts of Second Uncle?”

Qi Zhangfa sighed and said: “Among us three martial brothers, Second Brother has the most powerful martial arts. If he practiced the Liancheng Swordplay, I may believe that he could master it. But your teacher? No way!”

With his left hand he grabbed the wine jug, filled his bowl with wine and declared loudly, “Alright! On the sixteenth of next month, we will go to Jingzhou to celebrate your teacher’s birthday, as well

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<sup>1</sup> 1 catty = 500 g



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as see how well he has practiced his Liangcheng Swordplay.” He slammed the bowl of wine on the table again, and half the bowl of wine spilt out over the table and on his shirt.

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“Father, if you sold our cattle Dahuang, how can we farm next year?” asked Qi Fang.

“We will worry about next year when next year comes, why worry so much now?” replied Qi Zhangfa.

“Father, isn’t it better if we stay here? What’s the point of going to Jingzhou? Even if it’s Uncle Wan’s birthday, we shouldn’t sell off Dahuang...”

“I promised Bu Yuan that I would go, so I must not go back on my word. Besides, I can bring you and A’yun to a bigger place, so you don’t stay a rustic bumpkin your entire life.”

“What’s wrong with being a bumpkin? I don’t want to see the outside world. I have raised Dahuang since I was little. I gave him grass to eat and brought him back home. Father, can’t you see Dahuang is in tears, he doesn’t want to go.”

“Silly girl, that cow is a beast, what does it know? Let go of it.”

“I won’t let go! If you sell it to someone else, they will kill him and eat him, I can’t bear it.”

“They won’t kill him, they will only have him do farming.”

“Yesterday what did you say? You said you will definitely sell Dahuang to be killed. You lied to me. Dahuang is in tears. Dahuang, Dahuang, I won’t let you go. Brother Yun! Come quickly, father wants to sell Dahuang...”

“A’fang, your father doesn’t want to sell Dahuang either, but how can we go to Uncle Wan’s with empty hands?” reasoned Di Yun. “Besides, our clothes are dirty and ruined. We should get new clothes so people don’t think lowly of us.”

“Didn’t Uncle Wan give you a new hat?” added Qi Fang. “When you wear it, it gives off an aura of greatness.”

“Hah, the weather is so warm, how can I wear this sheep gown?” replied Qi Zhangfa. “Besides, your uncle claims to have completed the Liancheng Swordplay and I don’t believe him, I must see it for myself. Good child, please let go.”

Qi Fang said: “Dahuang, if they want to kill you, then use your force to attack them, and run back to us! Or not! They will chase after you, and then you should run as far as you can, up to the mountains...”

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Half a month later, Qi Zhangfa brought his disciple Di Yun and his daughter Qi Fang to Jingzhou. The three of them wore new attire. It was their first time entering a big city, so it was a bit

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overwhelming and caused some anxiety. They could not help but feel a bit helpless as they searched for “Five Cloud Hand” Wan Zhenshan’s whereabouts. They heard people say, “The whereabouts of Old Hero Wan’s residence, is there really a need to ask? It must be wherever the biggest house is.”

As Di Yun and Qi Fang approached the Wan Family’s residence, they saw the high walls and red-lacquered doors at the entrance. There were colourful lamps hung on the doors, showing the prestige of the family. Qi Fang held closely to her father. Qi Zhangfa was about to speak for entrance when Bu Yuan came out the front door.

Qi Zhangfa was delighted and said: “Worthy nephew, I have come!”

Bu Yuan quickly approached and said with joy, “Uncle Qi has arrived! Brother Di, Sister Qi, how have you been? Teacher was just thinking of Uncle, always saying, ‘Why hasn’t Brother Qi arrived yet?’ Let us go inside!”

As Qi Zhangfa and the other three entered through the front gate, they were greeted by the sounds of drummers playing a happy tune; the flutes played unexpectedly, giving Di Yun a shock. In the main hall, a burly old man could be seen greeting various guests.

Qi Zhangfa called out, “Brother, I have come!”

The old man turned around and looked as if he could not recognize him. The man felt a little stunned, but then a smile ran across his face. He laughed and said: “Old Third, you really have aged. I could barely recognize you!”

The two brothers were about to hold hands and reminiscent old times, when suddenly a strange aroma filled the room, followed by the sound of a smashing gong. A voice was heard: “Wan Zhenshan, ten years ago you owed me money, today will you pay up?” Qi Zhangfa turned to look at the speaker, a person was carrying a wooden bucket filled with dirty toilet water with both hands. The person splashed the bucket at Wan Zhenshan and himself. Qi Zhangfa saw that his daughter and disciple were standing on the side; he knew he could dodge the splash himself, but it would definitely land on her daughter. With some quick thinking, he came up with an idea. He grabbed his gown with both hands and unrobed. The dirty toilet water splattered all over his robe. With his precious robe ruined, he conveniently threw the gown at the assailant.

The person parried the toilet bucket to the side, causing both the robe and bucket to fall on the ground. A putrid smell filled the air. Qi Zhangfa saw that the person had a long beard and a monstrous appearance and stood with confidence. The assailant laughed and said: “Wan Zhenshan, our brothers come from thousands of li<sup>2</sup> away to celebrate. Although we are missing some gifts, we instead bring you ten thousand taels of gold. Wish you all the best!”

The eight disciples of Wan Zhenshan saw that this person was here to cause trouble and even dirtied one of the lamps in the room. In a fit of rage, the eight of them ganged up on this man, about to beat him half to death, when Wan Zhenshan ordered, “Don’t move!”

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<sup>2</sup> 1 li = 500 m

The eight disciples remained still. His second disciple Zhou Qi yelled: "Bastard! Who do you think you are? Today is Old Wan's birthday, yet you have the audacity to mess around. If I don't teach you a lesson, you won't realize the power of the Wan family!"

Wan Zhenshan recognized the background of the bearded man and said: "And I was wondering who it could be. It is none other than Taihang Mountain's Leader Lu. In the past few years Leader Lu has made a great fortune; his residence is filled with thousands of taels of gold, so naturally he would carry so much around."

When the crowd heard the name of "Taihang Mountain Leader Lu, many exchanged whispers. One said: "So it is Taihang Mountain's Lu Tong. He seems to have a misunderstanding with Elder Wan."

Lu Tong was considered the most powerful person amongst evil men in the Five Northern Provinces<sup>3</sup>. He was proficient with the techniques of the Six Sabre Stances and Six Fist Stances, and made a good name for himself around the Yellow River. Someone said: "People with good intentions don't come, and people who come have bad intentions! Today, there may be some trouble."

Lu Tong laughed and said: "Ten years ago, my brothers and I were at the Taiyuan Prefecture doing a trade, when someone secretly spread the word and ruined our sale. That's not the bad part, what's worse is that this caused my brother Lu Wei to get arrested and die of injustice. It wasn't until three years ago that I found out that it was the doing of this bastard Wan Zhenshan. How do you say we settle this?"

Wan Zhenshan replied: "You are correct. It is indeed I with the surname Wan who spread the secret. For someone trying to make a living in the realm, doing an unjust trade is already unforgivable, but what's worse is your brother Lu Wei raped innocent women, and even murdered four people. When I realized he was doing such horrible deeds, I could not let such injustice go unpunished."

When everyone heard this, they all shouted: "Such unrighteous deeds! Have you no shame!" Another said: "You bastard, you should be arrested by the authorities." Another added: "You rapist, how dare you cause trouble in Jiangling?"

Lu Tong turned tail and was about to leave, but shouted: "Wan Zhenshan, if you really think you are heroic, you should have come out in the open about the matter, then I would have respected you as a worthy fellow. Why be sneaky and snitch on us to the authorities? And why did you steal the six thousand taels of silver that we earned? You bastard, you are cheap and shameless! If you have the guts, come and let us have a fight to the death!"

Wan Zhenshan laughed. "Leader Lu, after having not seen you for ten years, your martial arts has increased substantially. It is unfortunate that with the likes of you, the higher your martial arts, the more people you will hurt. I am of old age now, but we will compare our skills." And with that, he stepped out.

Suddenly, amidst a group of people emerged a young man with thick eyebrows and big eyes. With a flip of his arms, he hooked both arms of Lu Tong and shouted: "You ruined my teacher's new clothes, you must pay for the damages!" The speaker was Qi Zhangfa's disciple, Di Yun.

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<sup>3</sup> The Five Northern Provinces refer to Zhili, Shandong, Shanxi, Henan, and Shaanxi.

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Lu Tong tried to break Di Yun's lock, but Di Yun held him too tightly without giving him a chance to escape. If Lu Tong could use his arm strength, he could use his renowned Iron Arm technique to repel him, but his arm was locked tight and he could not exert any strength. In a fit of rage, he attacked Di Yun's stomach with his left knee and yelled, "Let go of me!" Di Yun felt great pain and his arm lock weakened. Lu Tong followed with a stroke of "The Wind and Cloud Suddenly Rises" and broke his lock. Then he continued with a fist stroke of "The Dark Dragon Visits the Ocean", one of the techniques in his Six Fist Stances.

Di Yun retreated a few steps. "I won't fight with you," he said. "My teacher's new robe cost three taels of silver. We sold our cattle Dahuang and sewed three pieces of clothing. Today was only his first time wearing it..."

"Silly child, what nonsense do you speak of?" Lu Tong retorted.

Di Yun moved forward three steps and shouted, "Quickly pay the damages!" Since he had been raised in the countryside, he had a passion and understanding for the hard work people put into making stuff. He knew that his teacher sold his beloved cattle to purchase three new pieces of clothing; today was only his first time wearing it, yet it was already ruined by this bastard. How could he let this matter drop? He didn't care what misunderstandings Lu Tong had with Wan Zhenshan, his teacher's robe must be repaid.

"Nephew Di," Wan Zhenshan called out, "I will pay for your teacher's robe. Please step back."

Di Yun replied, "I want him to pay right now. If he leaves and you go back on your word, who is going to pay?" As he said this he went to Lu Tong to undress his robe, but Lu Tong dodged and punched Di Yun hard on the chest.

Wan Zhenshan repeated his command in a harsher tone, "Nephew Di, step back!"

Di Yun's eyes were red with fury and he said: "First you are unwilling to pay, and now you're beating me up. You are very unreasonable!"

Lu Tong laughed. "So what if I hit you?"

"Then I will hit you too!"

Di Yun got in a fighting stance, he attacked with his left palm and supported with his right palm. Lu Tong unleashed the "Attacking Tiger Stance"; he attacked with his right fist while his left leg remained idle. In a brief moment the two had already exchanged over a dozen stances. Di Yun had been training under Qi Zhangfa since he was young, and often sparred with his younger martial sister Qi Fang. He practiced swords every day without rest. Even though Lu Tong was an infamous bandit who made a name for himself amongst evildoers, at this moment he could not easily beat Di Yun. Several times he tried to unleash his Iron Arm technique, only to have it dodged by Di Yun. He hit him on the shoulder twice with two fists, but Di Yun had strong muscles and bones and was not easily wounded.

They continued to battle for several stances, when Lu Tong got frustrated and suddenly changed his fist technique from "Six Fist Stances" to the "Red Sacrum Connecting Fist." The latter was actually a

part of "Six Fist Stances", but it was a variation which had a different essence altogether. Di Yun had never seen such a fist technique, and with a fright, his left leg was hit by Lu Tong twice.

Wan Zhenshan could tell that Di Yun was losing and said, "Nephew Di back off, you can't beat him."

"Even if I can't beat him we still have to fight," Di Yun retorted. With a loud crash, his chest was hit by Lu Tong again. Qi Fang was watching from the sidelines and her face was full of worry. She could not resist anymore and said, "Martial brother, don't fight anymore! Let Uncle Wan handle it."

But Di Yun was relentless and continued to attack, saying, "I'm not afraid of you! I'm not afraid of you!"

Di Yun was struck again. This time his nose was hit with a fist and blood splattered everywhere. Wan Zhenshan's eyebrows creased with worry. "Brother, your disciple won't listen to me. Why don't you tell him to stop?" he suggested.

Qi Zhangfa replied, "Let him taste defeat. In a moment, I will fight this bastard myself."

Suddenly, from the front door entered an old beggar with a dirty face. He held a broken rice bowl with his left hand while he used a crutch on his right hand. "Today is elder's birthday, please be kind enough to spare a bowl of cold rice," he said.

Everyone present was watching the battle between Lu Tong and Di Yun, so nobody paid any attention to this old man. The old beggar cried, "Ohh! I'm going to starve! I'm going to starve!" Suddenly, his left foot accidentally slipped on the dirty toilet water on the ground. As he was about to fall over, he shouted, "Ah! I'm going to fall!" The bowl and bamboo stick he was holding in his hands both fell at the same time. Coincidentally, the broken bowl hit Lu Tong exactly on the "Zhitang Acupoint" on his back, while the bamboo stick hit Lu Tong's "Ququan Acupoint" around the curve of his knees.

At once Lu kneeled on his left leg and felt numbness around his entire body. Di Yun took the opportunity to unleash two fists at once, and with two loud claps, sent Lu Tong's large body flying across the hall. A splashing sound was heard as Lu Tong's body landed right amidst the pile of shit.

The sudden change of circumstances was quite unexpected. The crowd watched as Lu Tong made his way back up in a complete mess. Everyone in the audience burst into laughter. One of them shouted, "Capture him! Don't let this thief escape!"

"Pay the damages for my teacher's robe!" demanded Di Yun.

He wanted to attack again, but was grabbed on the shoulder from behind and couldn't move. He turned to look and saw that it was his teacher. Qi Zhangfa said, "You got lucky to win, why pursue?" Qi Fang took out a handkerchief and wiped the blood off Di Yun's face.

Di Yun looked down and saw that his new clothes were now ruined by many stains of blood, and shouted, "Oh dear! My... my new clothes are also ruined."

The old beggar was about to walk out the door, saying to himself: "Not only did I not get any food, I even lost my bowl!" Di Yun knew that his fluke victory was all thanks to the beggar's slip, so from

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his bosom he produced twenty coins that his teacher gave him as expenses. Di Yun rushed out the door to hand him the money. The beggar expressed his gratitude and left.

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That night, Wan Zhenshan prepared a banquet and treated with great honour the many guests that were present. He was a famous person in Jingzhou and as such he received a scroll of good fortune from the prefect. The words were glossed with gold and appeared quite prestigious. Everyone was discussing the events from earlier today, speaking of how Di Yun was blessed with good fortune when the old beggar entered at an opportune moment, causing Lu Tong to lose his concentration. Everyone was impressed that Di Yun had such bravery at such a young age; exchanging several dozen stances with an evildoer was quite an accomplishment. Everyone wished the best for Wan Zhenshan's birthday, saying that even though it was a coincidence that the old beggar entered, had Wan Zhenshan himself stepped in to battle, he would have defeated Lu Tong in a matter of a few stances. But for Wan Zhenshan to not have to step in and lower his dignity was just as well.

Di Yun received many compliments, causing the eight disciples of Wan Zhenshan to feel a bit ashamed. Lu Tong was after their teacher, yet they could do nothing to stop him. Instead, they had a petty disciple of their martial uncle to step in to fight. The eight disciples felt angry at heart but could not express their feelings.

After Wan Zhenshan gave a toast to everyone present, his first disciple Lu Kun, second disciple Zhou Qi, third disciple Wan Gui, fourth disciple Sun Jun, fifth disciple Bu Yuan, sixth disciple Wu Kan, seventh disciple Feng Tan, and eighth disciple Shen Cheng also made a toast to the people around. Among them, third disciple Wan Gui was the only son of Wan Zhenshan; he was tall with a great stature and looked like a gentleman born of a rich family, unlike first disciple Lu Kun and second disciple Zhou Qi, who had an average appearance.

After the eight of them offered a toast to the various famous scholars and clan leaders present, they offered one to their uncle Qi Zhangfa and conveniently offered one to Di Yun as well. Wan Gui said: "Today, Brother Di gave my father a lot of face. Among our eight martial brothers, we must all drink with Brother Di."

Brother Di had never been a drinker in the past, so he said, "I won't drink it, I won't drink it."

Wan Gui continued: "Today my father thrice requested for Brother Di to back off, yet Brother Di did not listen, as if my father was talking to thin air. Now we are offering you a drink and you refuse, do you mean to take the Wan family lightly?"

Di Yun was stunned by his words and uttered: "No... no I don't."

Qi Zhangfa could sense the negative implications of Wan Gui's statements, and said, "Yun'er, just drink it."

"I... I... I don't drink," said Di Yun.

Qi Zhangfa got frustrated and declared: "Drink it!"

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Di Yun had no choice but to obey. He downed one drink to each of his uncle's disciples, making eight drinks in total. His face flushed red and his stomach felt a bit nauseous.

That night when Di Yun went to bed, he felt nauseous and pains excruciated his chest, shoulders, and legs; the areas where Lu Tong had hit him during the fight. In the middle of the night, amidst his dreams, he suddenly heard someone yelling from out the window, "Brother Di, Di Yun, Di Yun!"

Di Yun quickly awakened and asked, "Who is it?"

The man outside replied: "It is Wan Gui, I have something to say to you, can Brother Di please step outside for a moment?"

Di Yun felt a bit dizzy, got out of bed, put on his clothes and sandals, and opened the window. All he could see was eight people lined up, each holding a long sword in hand. It was the eight disciples of Wan Zhenshan. "What did you call me for?" asked Di Yun.

Wan Gui replied: "We wish to test our sword skills with Brother Di."

Di Yun shook his head and replied: "My teacher said that I'm not allowed to spar with Uncle Wan's disciples."

Wan Gui smirked: "Looks like Uncle Qi has already acknowledged our superiority."

Di Yun angrily retorted: "What do you mean acknowledged?"

*Chi! Chi! Chi!* Suddenly, three sounds were heard as Wan Gui stroke Di Yun three times with his sword, the blade of the sword missing his face just barely. In shock, Di Yun moved back a few steps; he accidentally tripped his leg over a stool and fell, looking quite pathetic. Wan Zhenshan's eight disciples laughed heavily at the scene. Di Yun became enraged and produced a long sword from underneath his pillow and jumped out the window. He saw the eight unfriendly faces of Wan Zhenshan's disciples and wanted to attack, but remembered that his teacher told him not to get on bad terms with them, so he could only say, "What do you want from me?"

Wan Gui faked a stroke with his sword and said: "Brother Di, today you stepped out to fight out of bravery, thinking that our family in Jingzhou would have perished if not for your help, right? Do you take it that among the Wan clan, there is no one who is a match for Brother Di?"

Di Yun shook his head and said: "That person ruined my master's clothes, so of course I have to make him pay up. What does it matter to you?"

Wan Gui replied coldly: "You made a performance in front of all these renowned guests today and gave yourself a lot of face, while us eight brothers were shamed to no end. Not even to mention roaming the realm from now on, even within Jingzhou, how can we have any sort of respectable status anymore? What you did today, don't you think it was going a bit too far?"

Di Yun was stumped for words and said: "I... I don't know."

The eldest disciple, Lu Kun remarked: "Third Brother, this brat is playing us for a fool, why talk to him? Let's fight!"

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Wan Gui unleashed his long sword, aiming for Di Yun's left shoulder. Di Yun could tell that this was a fake stroke, so he did not defend himself at all. Wan Gui withdrew his sword after realizing Di Yun outwitted him and became even angrier. "Good, so you won't fight back?"

Di Yun replied: "Teacher said that I definitely cannot fight with uncle's disciples."

Suddenly, Wan Gui stroke out with his long sword and made a slash on Di Yun's right sleeve. Di Yun loved this new garment greatly, and now that it was unreasonably ruined by Wan Gui, he could not hold back his anger anymore and shouted: "You slashed my garment, you need to pay the damages!" Wan Gui laughed coldly and made another stroke with his sword, slashing his left sleeve. Di Yun quickly unsheathed his sword to counterattack. The two began to fight, the pace growing quicker and quicker as the fight prolonged. The two were using identical sword techniques, and after a dozen or so stances, Di Yun got annoyed and started to aim for Wan Gui's vital areas.

Zhou Qi shouted: "Hey! This brat really wants to take your life? Third Brother, no need to hold back!"

Di Yun was held aback by his words. "If by accident I really wound him, nothing good could come out of that." Accordingly, Di Yun started to lower the intensity and fatality of his strokes. Wan Gui realized that he was not as proficient with the sword as Di Yun, nor were his strokes fatal enough. Di Yun slowly backed off, then said: "I'm not really fighting you for real, what are you doing?"

Wan Gui replied: "What am I doing? I want to stab you a few times!" And with that he attacked again with his sword vertically; Di Yun dodged to the right and saw that Wan Gui's right shoulder exposed an opening, so with his long sword he stroke vertically at Wan Gui. But upon realizing that Wan Gui's shoulder would most certainly suffer damages, Di Yun turned his wrist and flipped the blade of his sword so that it was flat, then tapped his shoulder a few times.

Di Yun figured now that the outcome of the battle has been decided; this should be the point where Wan Gui admits defeat and backs off, as was often the case when he sparred with Qi Fang. But much to his surprise, Wan Gui's face flushed red with anger and actually stroke his sword vertically. Di Yun was caught off guard and was stabbed by Wan Gui on his left leg.

Lu Kun, Zhou Qi and the others applauded and said: "You little brat, fallen already? If you beg for mercy we might just let you go."

Another said: "It turns out that Uncle Qi's disciple from the countryside is nothing but an amateur!"

Di Yun was already enraged from being stabbed, but now upon hearing the others mock his teacher, he became even more furious. He gritted his teeth and brandished his sword with the intensity of a rainstorm. Wan Gui saw that his opponent was losing his mind and started to get nervous. Since he was little he had always been treated with utmost respect; even though his swordplay was decent, he had never fought a battle as serious as this before so he felt a bit frightened. It was evident as his sword moves began to weaken.

Bu Yuan saw that his third brother was going to lose, so he lifted a brick and threw it at Di Yun's spine. Di Yun was completely focused on attacking Wan Gui, when suddenly he felt a great pain on his back as he was hit hard with a brick. He turned around and reprimanded: "You guys have no shame, now fighting two-on-one?"



Bu Yuan replied. "What? What did you say?"

"Even if all eight of you fight me at once, I cannot put my teacher to shame," said Di Yun. He disregarded the sharp pain on his back and aimed his sword at Wan Gui. But by this time his sword stance was already disrupted by pain and as such he left many flaws and openings in his attack. However, he still exuded an aura of confidence and Wan Gui was hesitant to counterattack.

Bu Yuan gave a signal to his sixth brother Wu Kan and said: "Third Brother's swordplay is proficient, this brat cannot handle him. We should step in and break them up before he suffers any real damage for fear of being scolded by Uncle Qi."

Wu Kan nodded and said: "Good idea, we brothers should pay attention and not let Third Brother harm anyone with his sword." The two of them positioned themselves left and right and slashed Di Yun on the back.

Di Yun's swordplay originally was not more impressive than Wan Gui, it was only thanks to his mindless aggression and bravery was he able to take the upper hand. But now when Bu Yuan and Wu Kan went forward to attack together, it was three-against-one and Di Yun instantly faltered. With a sword stroke, his left leg was stabbed. This stab was not a light one. In fact he could no longer keep his balance and fell over. He did not let go of his sword, but he could not take the attacks of all three at once. Lu Kun groaned and with a flying kick sent Di Yun's long sword flying out of his wrist and landing amidst the bushes. Wan Gui stroke with his long sword, aiming for Di Yun's throat. Bu Yuan and Wu Kan both laughed heartily as they backed off.

Wan Gui, now having won the battle, laughed in great joy. "You rustic bumpkin, do you admit defeat?"

Di Yun replied: "Admit your face! The four of you ganged up on me, how do you consider yourselves honourable?"

Wan Gui made a faint stab on Di Yun's throat and blood gushed out of his wound. "Still so stubborn? If I use just a bit my strength, I could instantly slit your throat."

"Go ahead," Di Yun dared him, "if you have the guts then slit my throat, if you don't then you're a coward!"

Wan Gui became furious, stroke with his left foot and kicked Di Yun hard in the stomach, then shouted, "Bastard, let's see if you are still stubborn!"

This kick caused Di Yun's internal organs to feel as if they were crushed. He screamed in pain, gritted his teeth and cursed, "You stupid bastard, you son of a bitch!" Wan Gui gave him another hard kick, this time on his face. At this point, Di Yun felt dizzy and could no longer retort. He began to feel faint.

Wan Gui sneered: "Today we will let you go, quickly complain to your teacher and martial sister, tell them that we outnumbered and bullied you! We expect you to go home crying."

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Di Yun indignantly replied, "Complain about what? A true gentleman who seeks revenge only does so himself and seeks the assistance of none other."

Wan Gui expected him to say this, and replied: "Then let's leave a marking on your face, so as to make your teacher speak out." With that he gave Di Yun a hard kick on his right cheek and left eye that caused his face to swell; tears started to gush out of his eye.

Bu Yuan applauded and laughed. "Haha, the gentleman is crying! The hero turns into a fool!"

Di Yun was so angry that he felt his stomach was going to explode. He recalled how Bu Yuan went to his teacher's cottage and was treated so graciously with wine and chicken. He was honoured with utmost respect without the least bit of mistreatment, yet at this point Bu Yuan was humiliating him.

Wan Gui said: "You can't beat me, so why not complain to my father and have my father punish me to make yourself feel better. 'Waaah! Uncle Wan, your eight disciples beat me up to a pulp and left me crying! Waah! Uncle Wan, won't you correct this injustice?'"

"Only a sore loser like you would complain to the elders!" Di Yun scorned.

Wan Gui, Lu Kun, and Bu Yuan looked at each other and laughed, happy that they were able to expel their hatred. They retracted their swords back in their sheaths and said: "Brave fellow, if you have the guts then we will fight again tomorrow. We will take our leave now!" The eight of them laughed their way out.

Di Yun could only watch as the eight of them left him. In his heart he felt miserable, but even worse was that he could not understand their reasoning, thinking to himself: "I have never wronged them, and I have definitely not wronged their teacher, why did they beat me up so unexpectedly? Is it really the case that city folk are unreasonable?" With all his might he tried to summon the strength to stand up, but his head felt dizzy and he fell back down.

Suddenly, behind him a sigh was heard: "Alas, since you couldn't beat them, you should have begged for mercy. Now you have been beaten for no good reason, isn't that such a shame?" Di Yun turned to look at who the speaker was.

"I would rather be beaten to death than to submit to these cowards!" Di Yun retorted. He saw a man with a hunchback and worn-out sandals slowly approaching. He remembered that this was the beggar he saw from earlier today.

The old beggar said: "Alas, when a man grows old, the rheumatism on his back only gets worse. Little child, come massage my back!"

Di Yun felt angry, gave a "Hmph" and ignored him. The old beggar continued: "I have no descendants, and now that I'm old, there is no one willing to take care of me. Oh, the agony!" Holding his bamboo stick, he slowly trod his way out.

Di Yun saw that the beggar's back quivered greatly. As he had just been beaten up badly, he felt commiserated for the beggar. He shouted: "Hey, I have a dozen or so coins, take it to buy some buns!"

The old beggar trod his way back slowly, received the coins and said: "The pain on my back is getting worse, help me knead it!"

"Alright, let me bandage the wounds on my leg first."

"You only think of taking care of yourself and not others, how can you call yourself honourable?"

Di Yun was provoked by this statement, and said: "Fine! I will help you knead it!" He sat on the ground and started massaging his back with his palms.

After a few hits, the old beggar said: "Very good... very good, use a bit more strength!" Di Yun added a bit more strength to his hits. The beggar said: "Unfortunately it is not strong enough." Di Yun added even more strength, and the beggar sighed: "Alas, you are indeed a useless child; after getting beaten half to death, you no longer even have the ability to give a proper massage to an old man. Why is someone like you still alive in this world?"

Di Yun angrily retorted, "If I hit any harder, I'm afraid I will break your old bones."

The old beggar laughed: "If you were capable of breaking my back, you wouldn't have been on the floor getting beaten up."

Di Yun got very angry and increased his strength even more, the old beggar said: "Ah, that's better, but it's still too weak."

Di Yun punched the old beggar hard with his fist, but the old beggar only laughed. "Too weak... too weak... useless."

Di Yun said, "Old man, don't joke around with me, I really don't want to hurt you."

The old beggar sneered: "Do you really think you can hurt me? Give it your best shot, hit me once and see."

Di Yun gathered strength from his right arm, and was about to hit the beggar when the moonlight reflected the doddering physique of the old man. He became soft-hearted and said, "I won't share such petty insight with you!" and only lightly tapped his back.

Suddenly, he felt his waist was being pushed back and repelled. In an instant, his whole body was sent flying like prancing clouds. *Boom!* He fell on the grass with a loud crash and felt dizzy. He took a while to recover but still felt a bit dazed when he got up. He wasn't angry but was curious as to what happened.

"It was you... it was you who threw me?" he asked.

"Who else is here besides me?" the beggar replied.

"How did you throw me away?"

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“On my bed I look at the moon, I bow my head and think of home.”<sup>4</sup>

Di Yun became curious and asked: “That was the sword technique that my teacher taught me... how do you know it?”

“Fist techniques and swordplay are all the same. Besides, your teacher did not teach it to you correctly.”

Di Yun angrily retorted: “How did my teacher teach me wrong? How can a beggar like you even question my teacher’s abilities?”

“If your master taught you correctly, then why didn’t you win the fight earlier?”

“They were ganging on me three or four at a time, of course I couldn’t take them all,” Di Yun reasoned. “But if it was one-against-one, do you think I would lose?”

The old beggar laughed. “Haha, in battle, who says it has to be one-against-one? If you want to fight one-against-one and your opponents don’t, what can you do? Then you would have to kneel down and beg for mercy. If one person can take on a dozen people at once, then that is a true warrior.”

Di Yun thought that what the old beggar said wasn’t irrational, and replied: “But they are my uncle’s disciples, and our sword skills are comparable. How am I supposed to take on all eight of them?”

The old beggar replied: “I will teach you a few techniques which will guarantee you victory against the eight of them, do you want to learn it?”

Di Yun was overjoyed and exclaimed, “I want to learn it!” But upon further contemplation, he thought that such profound abilities may not exist in this world. Furthermore, the old beggar would most certainly not possess such abstruse martial arts, so he became hesitant. Suddenly, someone grabbed him from behind and sent his body flying into the air, this time spinning two full somersaults before falling heavily to the ground. His arm landed smack down on the floor and his joints were nearly dislocated. When he got back up, he was in so much pain he couldn’t speak, but in his heart he was extremely pleased, and said, “Old... old uncle, I want to learn from you.”

The old beggar said: “Tonight, I will teach you a few techniques. Tomorrow night, you will fight the eight of them again. Do you dare?”

Di Yun thought: “Your martial arts abilities are so high, how can I learn it in merely a day?” But when he thought about the opportunity of defeating Wan Gui, Lu Kun and the others, he could not resist and declared: “I dare! The worst that can happen is that I get beat up again, what’s the big deal?”

The old beggar extended his left hand, grabbed Di Yun by the neck and slammed it on the floor, and scolded: “Stupid brat, I’m teaching you martial arts, how can you lose to them? Do you not trust me?”

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<sup>4</sup> This is the last two lines of a poem by Li Bai, which talks about reminiscing one’s hometown.

Di Yun felt pain from the fall, but he felt even more excited and quickly replied: "Right! Right! I spoke incorrectly. May elder please teach me now."

The old beggar said: "First, execute the sword techniques that you have already learned, and as you are executing them, recite the names of the techniques!"

"Alright," Di Yun replied. He saw that his leg was still bleeding and hastily wrapped the wound. Then he grabbed his long sword from the grass and executed the techniques that his master had taught him while reciting the names of the techniques. His pace became faster as he executed and recited the techniques quicker. He was still in the middle of executing his techniques when the old beggar suddenly laughed. Di Yun retracted his sword and asked: "Did I mess up?" The old beggar did not reply, he had his hands on his stomach and laughed heartily, Di Yun got a bit angry and said: "Even if I am not performing well, there is nothing funny about that."

The old beggar abruptly stopped laughing and said: "Qi Zhangfa is indeed Qi Zhangfa, you are impressively vicious." He shook his head and said: "Give me your sword." Di Yun threw the sword over to the beggar. The beggar caught the sword and faintly recited: "The lonely bird rises from the ocean, the pond does not dare to care." He executed his moves with the swiftness of a dancer, as if upon holding the sword he suddenly transformed into a different person. He had a calm composure and his sword moves were executed with elegance.

Di Yun observed the sword techniques, then suddenly a thought came to his mind, and he said: "Elder, today when I was fighting against Lu Tong, did you purposely throw your bowl at him to help me?"

The beggar replied with annoyance: "Do you even have to ask? 'Six Fist Stances' Lu Tong's martial arts is much superior to yours, do you really think you could have beaten him?" He spoke all while still executing his sword moves. Di Yun felt strange as he noticed that the mnemonics the beggar recited were not much different from his own. It only sounded different, yet the sword techniques were entirely different.

Suddenly, he switched his sword to his left hand and with his right hand he slapped Di Yun's face. Di Yun was shocked and angrily said: "Why... why did you hit me?"

The old beggar laughed and replied: "I'm teaching you swordplay, and you aren't even paying attention, of course you deserve to be hit."

Di Yun thought that the old beggar was right, so he became calm and replied: "You're right, my mistake. I was thinking that the sword mnemonics you recited were identical to my teacher's, yet your execution of the moves are entirely different, how strange."

The old beggar asked: "Do I perform it better, or does your teacher perform it better?"

Di Yun shook his head and said, "I don't know."

The old beggar returned Di Yun the long sword and said, "Let us spar."

"My skill level is nowhere close to yours, I can't spar with you," replied Di Yun.

The old beggar laughed. “Well, looks like this silly child is not completely stupid. How about this: we will only compare techniques and not internal energy.” He held a bamboo stick on his hands as a substitute for the sword and aimed it at Di Yun. Di Yun adjusted his sword horizontally to block. He saw that the beggar did not move his stick and pressed forward to attack. But as he stroke his sword towards the beggar, the bamboo stick rose like a violent snake, and with a forward momentum he was hit on the shoulder.

Di Yun felt defeated and complimented, “Excellent! Excellent!” With his sword still horizontal he now aimed it directly at the beggar. The beggar flipped his bamboo stick and matched it next to his sword. Di Yun tried to counterattack but the beggar’s bamboo stick spun several circles on the sword and repelled any strength directed at him back to his opponent. Di Yun could not keep a firm grasp any longer and the long sword flew out of his palms. He was expressionless for a moment. After a while he said, “Elder, your swordplay is truly remarkable.”

The old beggar used his bamboo stick to pick up the long sword that fell on the floor. He picked up the sword effortlessly as if it was glued to the stick. “Your teacher has a set of good martial arts, and he only taught you this? Hmm, that is strange.” He shook his head and continued: “In regards to your clan’s ‘Tang Poem Swordplay’; every stance is a recitation of a line of a poem from the Tang Dynasty.”

Di Yun replied: “What Tang Poem Swordplay? Teacher said it is called the ‘Reclining Corpse Swordplay’<sup>5</sup>, its essence is to force the opponent to recline like a corpse.”

The old beggar laughed. “It is ‘Tang Poem’ not ‘Reclining Corpse’!” he corrected. “Your teacher told you it was ‘Reclining Corpse’? That is funny! The two stances ‘The Lonely Bird Rises from the Ocean, The Pond Does not Dare to Care’ talks about a lonely and isolated bird that rises from the ocean, sees a small pond on land, and doesn’t stop to rest. These two lines were written by the Tang Dynasty chancellor Zhang Jiu; he used an analogy of himself as a man of high status who does not fight for fame and glory. He turned this into a swordplay, hence a sense of pride and elegance in the technique. The ‘does not dare to care’ part means ‘does not dare to look’. Your teacher taught you ‘Brother Weng Shouts Up, Dare not Cross the Horizontal’; the former line became an outcry, the latter became overcautious. The original intent was to have nothing left of the sword. Your teacher is really remarkable. ‘Iron Lock Across the River’ teaches his disciples in such a way, impressive, impressive!” As he said this he grinned.

Di Yun was shocked by his words and sunk in deep thought. He was not very literate so he did not quite understand the meaning behind the stances. Although the old beggar may be right, Di Yun had always shown great respect towards his teacher, so he assumed that what his teacher said was flawless and never questioned him. Upon hearing the old beggar’s words, he felt a bit bitter in his heart. Then he turned around and said, “I’m going to sleep! I don’t want to learn anymore.”

The old beggar was surprised. “Why? Did I say something wrong?”

“You may very well be right, but you spoke poorly of my teacher, and as such I can no longer learn from you. My teacher is a farmer and isn’t very literate, so he would not understand what you just described.”

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<sup>5</sup> In Chinese, “Reclining Corpse” is pronounced “Tangshi” which is just like “Tang Poem”.

The old beggar laughed. "Your teacher is illiterate? Haha, that is very strange."

"A farmer who is illiterate, what is there to laugh about?" Di Yun angrily replied.

The beggar laughed heartily, caressed him on the head and said, "Good! You are a child with a kind heart, I like you. I ask for your forgiveness, from now on I will no longer disrespect your teacher, alright?"

Di Yun was delighted and smiled. "As long as you don't talk poorly of my teacher, I could kowtow to you." And with that he knelt on the floor and gave several loud kowtows. The old beggar laughed and happily accepted his kowtows. Then he decided to explain some of the sword mnemonics. What is meant by "The Wind Suddenly Blows, The Mountain Escapes Like a Cloth" is really "Facing Down Can Hear the Winds, Continuous Mountains Suppose Undulating Waves"; what is meant by "The Falling Mud Welcomes Big Sister, The Horse Blows a Little Wind" is actually "The Sunset Reflects the Banner, The Horse Cries Soughing Winds." By Hunan dialect tones, the words "mud" and "day" were pronounced similarly. In all of the old beggar's speech, he never mentioned anything negative about Qi Zhangfa and only intended to correct mistakes in Di Yun's swordplay.

The old beggar said: "There are too many precarious segments to your swordplay, I cannot point them out all at once. Now I will teach you three techniques so tomorrow you will fight those eight pathetic bullies again. Remember these mnemonics carefully."

Di Yun gave his complete attention to the beggar's demonstrations with the bamboo stick. The beggar explained: "The first technique is the 'Piercing Shoulder Stance'; if the enemy is stubbornly defensive and you can't find an opening, you only need to unleash this sword phase attack, and you will immediately be able to break through his defense and pierce his shoulder. The second stance, 'Slap-in the-face Stance' was the one I used against you earlier; the sword switches to the left hand, and the right hand slaps the opponent right in the face. This stance is strange and unorthodox, even if your opponent knows what you are planning, if he dodges to the left then you hit to the left, if he dodges to the right then hit to the right; the more he tries to dodge the harder he gets hit. The third stance is the 'Releasing Sword Stance'; it was the stance I executed earlier when I used my bamboo stick to knock the long sword out of your hand."

These three stances had all been used against Di Yun during their battle. Originally, each one of them had an elegant name in the form of a line from a Tang poem, but the old beggar knew that Di Yun was quite illiterate and wouldn't understand such complicated mnemonics. It would only make things harder to remember, so instead he changed these mnemonics to more convenient names.

Di Yun was not exceptionally clever. Although he had an ill-temper he was highly determined, and the three stances took him over two hours before he could execute them skillfully.

The old beggar laughed. "Good!" he complimented. "You have to promise me one thing: you must not speak to anyone that I taught you swordplay today, including your teacher and your martial sister, or else..."

Di Yun respected his teacher like his father and had already loved his beautiful martial sister secretly for quite some time. He had nothing to hide from his teacher, much less his martial sister, so he was at a loss for words.

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The old beggar sighed and continued: “The reason herein, I cannot tell you at this point in time, but if you reveal the events of today, my life will be in jeopardy. I will most certainly fall prey to ‘Five Cloud Hand’ Wan Zhenshan’s sword.”

Di Yun was astonished and said: “Elder, your martial arts are so powerful, how can you fear my martial uncle?”

The old beggar did not answer and slowly started to leave. Then he said, “Whether or not you have ill-intentions towards me depends on you.”

Di Yun rushed forward beside him and said: “I cannot even thank elder enough, why would I want to harm your life? Let it be known that if I break this promise, I shall be punished by heaven and earth.”

The old beggar let out a deep sigh and continued walking. Di Yun stood motionless for a bit, then remembered that he had not asked the old beggar his name, shouting: “Elder! Elder!” but he was already long gone.

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Early the next morning, Qi Zhangfa noticed that Di Yun’s eyes were blue and his nose was swollen. He became curious and asked, “Who did you fight with to get beat up like this?”

Di Yun did not like to tell lies and found it difficult to give an adequate reply. Qi Fang laughed. “Isn’t it the fight from yesterday when you battled with the bandit Lu Tong that caused this?” she asked.

Qi Zhangfa could not remember last night’s events too clearly, so he did not further pursue the matter. Qi Fang pulled on Di Yun’s shirt and the two of them went out from the side door until they reached the side of a well. They looked to see that there was no one else in sight before they both sat on top of the well.

Qi Fang asked, “Martial brother, who did you fight with last night?” Di Yun did not answer. Qi Fang continued: “You don’t have to hide it from me, yesterday when you fought with Lu Tong, I remember very clearly where he hit you. He definitely didn’t hit you in the eyes or nose.”

Di Yun knew that he could not hide the truth from her, and thought: “As long as I don’t tell her about the elder, it should be okay.” So he told her everything that happened last night: how the eight disciples of the Wan clan came to look for him, how they fought, and how he badly he was humiliated.

As Qi Fang heard his story, her beautiful face flushed red with anger. “They fought you eight on one, what honour do they have?” she complained.

“It wasn’t all eight of them at once, just three or four at the same time,” Di Yun corrected.

Qi Fang retorted, “Hmph, it would only take three or four of them to defeat you, the others have no need to step in. If the three or four of them couldn’t beat you, then it would have been five or six, or seven or eight at once.”



Di Yun nodded in agreement. "That is probably true."

Qi Fang stood up. "Let's go tell my father, and have Wan Zhenshan dictate the justice." In a fit of rage she did not even address him as "Uncle Wan" and instead addressed him by his full name.

Di Yun declined. "No, I lost a fight. If I complain to my teacher, people will take me for a coward."

Qi Fang felt contemptuous, but felt sympathy when she saw how badly his clothes were ripped. From her bosom she produced a sewing kit and started to mend together the holes in his clothes. As her hair rubbed against his chin he began to feel itchy; he could smell the fragrant scent of her skin and his mind began to wander. "Martial sister!" he cried.

"Water Spinach, don't talk!" she urged. "Don't let people mistake you for a thief."

The people in Jiangnan were highly superstitious, believing that people who talked while having their clothes mended would be accused of stealing. "Water Spinach" was the nickname that Qi Fang gave to Di Yun, which mocked his straightforward and unsuspicious nature.

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At night time, Wan Zhenshan held a banquet in the dining room and invited Qi Zhangfa and his two disciples, as well as his own disciples, making 12 people in total sitting together in a round table. After three rounds of wine, Wan Zhenshan saw that Di Yun's lips were greatly swollen and could not eat well. "Nephew Di, yesterday must have been difficult for you. Come, eat a bit more." He grabbed a chicken with his chopsticks and placed it on Di Yun's plate. Wan Zhenshan's second disciple Zhou Qi snorted in contempt.

Qi Fang was already angry from the earlier events, but now she could not hold back any longer and shouted: "Uncle Wan, my martial brother's wounds were not caused by Lu Tong, it was the doing of your eight disciples!"

Wan Zhenshan and Qi Zhangfa felt astonished at once, and asked, "What?"

Of the eight disciples of the Wan clan, eighth disciple Shen Cheng was the youngest and naturally the cheekiest. He quickly retorted: "Brother Di defeated Lu Tong and claimed that teacher did not have the guts to stir up trouble and was afraid to fight Lu Tong. He said that it was all thanks to his efforts in subduing Lu Tong that saved teacher from embarrassment. We could not take this humiliation so..."

Wan Zhenshan's face changed colors, but then he laughed. "Yes, it was all thanks to Nephew Di that we saved face."

Shen Cheng said: "Brother Wan said that he was offensive in his language and could not resist sparring with Brother Di. It seems like Brother Wan had the advantage."

Di Yun angrily retorted, "You... you speak nonsense... I... when did I..." he was quite fluent in speech and upon hearing Shen Cheng speak out such lies, he wanted to defend himself, but he was so angry that he could not make out his words properly.

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“How did Gui’er hold the advantage?” asked Wan Zhenshan.

Shen Cheng replied: “Last night when Brother Wan sparred with Brother Di, we were not present to observe. Early in the morning Brother Wan told everyone that he used a technique... used a technique...” he turned his head towards Wan Gui and inquired: “Brother Wan, what technique did you use to defeat Brother Di?”

Wan Gui replied: “The Moon in Chang’an, The Wan Family Threshes Clothes’.” They completely omitted the fact that they had ganged up on him, as if it never happened. They did not mention how Wan Gui was provoking Di Yun. The ones who were present at the scene were all on Wan Gui’s side, so naturally nobody spoke of such matters. Furthermore, Shen Cheng was about 15 or 16 years old and had an innocent look. Nobody suspected him of speaking anything but the truth.

Wan Zhenshan nodded. “So that is what happened.”

Qi Zhangfa’s face turned bright red. He slammed the table hard and yelled: “Yun’er, I told you specifically not to get on bad terms with anyone from the Wan clan, let alone do battle!”

When Di Yun realized that even his teacher believed what Shen Cheng said, he began to shake violently in anger and defended, “Teacher, I... I did not...”

Qi Zhangfa slapped him hard across the face and scolded: “You did the wrong thing and you are still making excuses!”

Di Yun did not dare to parry his attack. Qi Zhangfa indeed gave a very hard slap; Di Yun’s face was already swollen and this made it even worse. Qi Fang quickly intercepted. “Father, you haven’t even confirmed this!” she reasoned.

Di Yun’s ill-temper suddenly got the best of him. He became furious and stood up, picked up one of the long swords situated behind him, unsheathed it, and stepped outside the room. Then he said: “Teacher, this Wan... Wan Gui said he beat me, tell him to fight me again and we’ll see.”

Qi Zhangfa grew furious and shouted: “Where are you going?” He left his seat and went out, claspings his fists together. Qi Fang tried to hold her father back, yelling: “Father! Father!”

Di Yun spoke loudly: “The eight of you should fight me again. If you have any guts then come all at once, whoever doesn’t come is a turtle bastard’s son!” Under extreme fury he could not control his tongue and uttered such foul language.

Wan Zhenshan’s eyebrows wrinkled and he said: “That being the case, why don’t you guys go and challenge your Brother Di’s swordplay?”

The eight disciples were anxiously hoping that their teacher would say this and gladly accepted. They each took their long swords and spread themselves in eight directions, with Di Yun in the middle.

Di Yun shouted contemptuously: “Yesterday night I was defeated by eight bastards ganging up on me, today we have another eight bastards...”

“Yun’er, what nonsense do you speak of?” Qi Zhangfa yelled. “If you are going to spar then spar, why talk trash?”

When Wan Zhenshan heard the word “bastard” spewed out of Di Yun’s mouth left and right, he became angry for real, since among his eight disciple was his biological son Wan Gui, hence Di Yun was indirectly insulting him. He saw his eight disciples position themselves in eight directions, planning to attack all at once. Wan Zhenshan scolded: “Your Brother Di looks down on you guys, planning to fight you guys one-against-eight, do you guys also look down on yourselves?”

The eldest disciple Lu Kun replied: “That’s right. Younger martial brothers please step back, let me first test the abilities of Brother Di.”

Fifth disciple Bu Yuan was one who was full of treachery. Last night he saw the sparring match between Di Yun and Wan Gui and realized that the former had some decent martial arts. This was a desperate situation, and his eldest martial brother may not necessarily be able to win. If Di Yun wins this first match, there will naturally be someone to defeat him, but the prestige of the Wan clan would have already been lost. Among the eight disciples, fourth disciple Sun Jun had the most formidable swordsmanship, it would be best to let him fight so there can be no excuses.

Bu Yuan said: “Eldest martial brother is the model of our clan, why should he be the one to fight? Let Fourth Brother fight instead.”

Lu Kun thought for a moment and understood Bu Yuan’s intention so he happily accepted the offer. Bu Yuan continued: “Alright, Fourth Brother, let’s see you in action.” The seven of them backed off to observe, leaving only Sun Jun and Di Yun in the middle of the circle.

Sun Jun was quite a reticent fellow and was not much of a talker. Instead, he focused his time on practicing martial arts. As a result, his swordsmanship was the best among his martial brothers. When he heard that his younger martial brother wanted him to fight, he immediately drew his long sword and curved his body slightly to a bow-shaped fighting stance. This stance was called “The Wans Admire Their Lineage, Bowing with Great Attire.” It was a sword stance of great customs. Back when Qi Zhangfa taught Di Yun swordplay, he called this stance “The Rice Dumpling Turns Foul, The Officer Bows to the Monkey” the meaning was that “I am a big bowl of rice, while you are a rotten rice dumpling, I appear to yield to you, to respect you, when I actually despise you deeply. I am an officer and you are a monkey; when I pay respect to you, it is an officer showing respect to a beast.”

When Di Yun saw that his opponent was executing this move he became even more furious. At once he drew his sword in a fighting stance and curved his body in a bow-shape, returning the same stance used against him, “The Rice Dumpling Turns Foul, The Officer Bows to the Monkey.” The two remained in a standstill, neither side showing any sign of weakness.

Di Yun attacked first and pointed his long sword dead on Sun Jun’s abdominal area. The disciples of the Wan clan were shocked. Sun Jun manoeuvred his sword to a defensive position and the two swords clashed against each other. Soon, the arms of both fighters became numb.

Lu Kun said: “Teacher, look at how ruthless this brat is, he wants to take Brother Sun’s life!”

## Chapter 1 – The Countrymen Enter the City

Wan Zhenshan became a bit worried and thought: “This little bumpkin is so cynical, the battle has just begun and he’s already going for the kill?”

*Ting! Ting Ting!* Many rattling sounds were emitted from their swords. It was clear that both Di Yun and Sun Jun were giving it their all. After about a dozen stances, Sun Jun’s long sword slanted and revealed an opening on his lower abdomen. Di Yun shouted loudly and aimed his sword toward the opening. Sun Jun defended and managed to keep Di Yun’s sword at bay. With a loud crash from his palms, Sun Jun attacked Di Yun hard on the chest. All the Wan disciples were in shock, and one shouted: “You can’t even beat one of us, why exaggerate and try to take us all?”

Di Yun turned around, picked up his long sword, and forcefully attacked like a violent storm. Sun Jun blocked several stances and drew his long sword to counterattack, when suddenly Di Yun’s long sword started to jitter and a light stabbing sound was heard—he had already stabbed into Sun Jun’s shoulder. This was the “Piercing Shoulder Stance” that the old beggar had taught him.

The “Piercing Shoulder Stance” was indeed uncalled for and was beyond all expectations. Upon seeing that Sun Jun tremble as his shoulder bled profusely, all of the Wan disciples were taken aback. Lu Kun and Zhou Qi both drew their swords and rushed forward to attack. Di Yun slashed left and right with his long sword and two stabbing sounds were heard. Both Lu Kun and Zhou Qi’s right shoulders were pierced by his long sword, and the sword in their hands both fell to the ground.

Wan Zhenshan’s face began to sink, then he remarked, “Very good!”

Wan Gui held his long sword firmly, staring at Di Yun with great contempt. Suddenly, he shouted violently and rushed in to attack. He swiped his sword three times but Di Yun parried them all. Then he switched his sword to his left hand, and with his right hand he gave a backhand and smacked Wan Gui hard on the face. This technique was even more sudden than the last. Wan Gui was completely startled. Di Yun gave a flying kick with his left leg and kicked Wan Gui hard on the chest. Wan Gui could not endure the blow and fell on the ground. Bu Yuan quickly went to assist Wan Gui but was intercepted by Di Yun. Bu Yuan could only lift his sword up to defend. The remaining three disciples Wu Kan, Feng Tan, and Shen Cheng saw that Di Yun was very brutal. He had knocked down Wan Gui so hard that the latter could not even draw the strength to get back up. Furious, they each drew their weapons and circled around Di Yun. At this time, the maids in the Wan family heard the sound of battle from the dining room and quickly went to observe.

Qi Zhangfa stared intensely at the battle with startled eyes. He seemed hesitant and did not know what to do.

Qi Fang shouted: “Father, they are all picking on martial brother! You must save him!” At once she unsheathed her sword from her waist and rushed beside Di Yun, blocking the two sword attacks of Wu Kan and Feng Tan.

## Chapter 2 – Prison



*He was in a deep sleep when suddenly he heard the sounds of iron chains scratching against the floor; the four gaolers brought the prisoner back to his cell. Di Yun glanced over at the prisoner and saw that his entire body was covered in blood, evidently given a harsh beating by the gaolers.*

## Chapter 2 – Prison

The sounds of weapons clashing were heard continuously. *Ting! Ting Ting!* With a series of white flashes, swords were sent flying in all directions. One sword flew right amongst the crowd of servants. The numerous maids were in shock, some fell on the seat opposite the host, while others held onto the handle against the crossbeam. In an instant, the swords of Bu Yuan, Wu Kan, Feng Tan, and Shen Cheng were all taken away by Di Yun's "Releasing Sword Stance."

Wan Zhenshan laughed and applauded. "Good! Good! Brother Qi, looks like you have completed the Liancheng Swordplay! Congratulations!" There was a subtle hint of bitterness in his voice.

Qi Zhangfa was stunned. "What Liancheng Swordplay?" he asked.

"If Nephew Di's technique was not Liancheng Swordplay, then what was it? Kun'er, Qi'er, Gui'er, come back. Your Brother Di has learned Uncle Qi's Liancheng Swordplay, how can you be any match for him?" He turned to Qi Zhangfa and sneered: "Martial brother, you're sure good at feigning ignorance. 'Iron Lock Across the River' is truly remarkable."

Di Yun had executed the "Piercing Shoulder Stance", "Slap-in-the-face Stance", and the "Releasing Sword Stance" in succession and managed to defeat all eight of his opponents. He was pleasantly surprised to find that he could win so easily and was actually perplexed. He looked at his teacher, martial sister, and martial uncle, unsure of what to say.

Qi Zhangfa approached Di Yun, then suddenly grabbed the long sword from his hand and pointed it at his neck. "Those sword stances... who taught it to you?" he interrogated.

Di Yun was taken aback. Usually he would not dare to hide anything from his teacher, but the old beggar stated very clearly that if Di Yun were to reveal anything about their encounter, the beggar's life would be put in jeopardy. Furthermore, Di Yun had made an oath to not reveal anything about, so he could only say: "Tea... teacher... disciple... disciple figured it out on his own."

Qi Zhangfa shouted: "You came up with such brilliant stances on your own? You... you dare speak such nonsense to me! If you don't reveal the truth, I will kill you right now." He moved his wrist forward and the blade of the sword cut Di Yun's throat slightly.

Qi Fang rushed forward and held tightly onto her father's arms. "Father! Martial brother was with us the whole time, how could anyone teach him martial arts? Weren't those sword stances taught by you?"

Wan Zhenshan sneered. "Brother Qi, why do you insist on playing innocent? Your daughter has already spoken of the matter quite clearly. You need not demonstrate the acting abilities of 'Iron Lock Across the River' in front of your martial brother. Come now! Brother will toast you three cups of wine!" As he said that he filled up two cups of wine, downed one cup and said: "Big brother will drink first as respect! You should show me some face."

Qi Zhangfa snorted, dropped his sword on the ground and fetched the wine cup. He downed three cups in a row and felt slightly dizzy. He was still a bit confused and remarked, "Strange! Strange!"

Wan Zhenshan said: "Brother Qi, there is something I want to discuss with you privately, please come to the study room with me." Qi Zhangfa nodded in agreement. Wan Zhenshan put his hands on his shoulder and together they went to the study room.

Wan Zhenshan's eight disciples looked at each other speechless, some faces turned blue while some whispered curses.

Shen Cheng said, "I'm going to the washroom! The stances that brat Di Yun pulled really scared me."

Lu Kun's face sunk in disgust and shouted, "Eighth Brother, have you not embarrassed yourself enough?"

Shen Cheng stuck his tongue out and left in a hurry. He went out from the dining room door and headed to the washroom but on the way he stopped by the living room to eavesdrop. He heard the sound of his teacher's voice. "Brother Qi, for twenty years the mystery remained unsolved, but today there is finally a solution."

He heard Qi Zhangfa reply: "Little brother does not understand what you mean by this."

"Why do you make me say any more? Do you remember how our teacher died?"

"Teacher lost one of his martial arts manuals and could not recover it. He died under great depression. You already know this, why ask?"

"Correct. And what is the name this martial arts manual?"

"How would I know? Why ask me?"

"I heard teacher say it was called 'Liancheng Manual.'"

"What completed or not completed?<sup>1</sup> I don't understand one bit."

"He who knows is not as he who desires, he who desires is not as what..."

"Not as he who knows not!"

"Hehe... haha, haha!"

"What is so funny?"

"You are actually well-versed in literature, yet you pretend to be ignorant. We martial brothers have been training together for over a dozen years, who doesn't know whose background? If you don't know the words 'Liancheng Manual', how could you recite the analects of Confucius or Mencius?"<sup>2</sup>

"You are testing me, aren't you?"

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<sup>1</sup> The word "completed" is pronounced Liancheng, the same as the Liancheng Manual. It is also called "A Deadly Secret" (the title of the novel).

<sup>2</sup> Confucius and Mencius are two of the most renowned Chinese philosophers in history.

“Hand it over!”

“Hand what over?”

“You already know, why feign ignorance?”

“I, Qi Zhangfa, have never been afraid of you.”

Shen Cheng heard his teacher and martial uncle bicker louder and louder and he became afraid. He quickly ran back into the living room, went to Lu Kun and whispered: “Elder Brother, teacher and Uncle Qi are bickering loudly, I fear a battle may ensue!”

Lu Kun stood up straight and said, “Then let’s go!” Zhou Qi, Wan Gui, Sun Jun and the others hurriedly followed.

Qi Fang pulled on Di Yun’s sleeves and said, “Let’s go too!”

Di Yun nodded and ran two steps when Qi Fang grabbed a long sword. Di Yun turned around and saw Qi Fang holding two long swords and asked, “Two swords?”

“Father did not carry a weapon!” she answered.

The eight disciples of the Wan clan had faces full of worry as they stood outside the study room. Di Yun and Qi Fang stood farther behind them. The ten of them tried to regulate their breathing while quietly eavesdropping the bickering inside the room.

“Brother Qi, our teacher’s death... it was because of you.” It was the voice of Wan Zhenshan.

“Nonsense! Complete nonsense! Brother Wan, you accuse me so clearly. Then tell me, how did I cause our teacher’s death?” Under extreme anger, Qi Zhangfa was very loud and his voice was hoarse.

“Teacher’s martial arts manual is called ‘A Deadly Secret’, were you not the one who stole it?”

“How do I know of any deadly person, or deadly ghost? Brother Wan, if you want to frame me with the surname Qi, it won’t be so easy.”

“The sword stances that your disciple executed, are they not from the Liancheng Swordplay? How could his techniques be so clever and fluent?”

“My disciple has always been intelligent, he must have come up with it himself—even I don’t know it. How could it be any Liancheng Swordplay? You told your disciple Bu Yuan to invite me over, saying that you have completed this Liancheng Swordplay, did you not? We can ask Bu Yuan to confirm this!”

Everyone outside the room looked at Bu Yuan, whose face turned deathly pale. Clearly Qi Zhangfa was speaking the truth; Di Yun and Qi Fang exchanged glances and nodded, thinking: “I heard Bu Yuan say this as well, there is no denying it.”



Wan Zhenshan laughed loudly and replied: "Of course I said this. Otherwise, how could I get you to come over? Qi Zhangfa, I ask you now: you claim you have never heard of the Liancheng Swordplay. If so, why did your expression change so drastically when Bu Yuan said I had completed this swordplay? How can you still deny it?"

"Aha! You with the surname Wan swindled me to come to Jingzhou?"

"Correct. Hand over the sword manual, then kowtow to our master's grave to admit your misdeeds."

"Why should I hand it over to you?"

"Hmph! I am your elder martial brother!"

The room fell quiet for a while, then Qi Zhangfa's voice was heard: "Alright, I'll give it to you."

Everyone outside the room became startled when they heard these words. Di Yun and Qi Fang only wished there was a hole they could crawl into to bury their shame. Lu Kun and the other Wan disciples looked at Di Yun and Qi Fang with great resentment. Qi Fang was angry too and also felt a sense of extreme humiliation, she would have never believed that her father did such a disgraceful deed.

Suddenly, a loud and enduring scream was heard from inside the room. It was Wan Zhenshan. Wan Gui shouted, "Father!" and quickly kicked open the door and burst into the room. He saw that Wan Zhenshan lying on the floor, his chest stabbed by a very sharp and dazzling dagger, his entire body was covered in blood. The window was wide open and Qi Zhangfa was nowhere to be seen.

Wan Gui cried mournfully. "Father! Father!" He held Wan Zhenshan tightly.

Qi Fang also cried, "Father! Father!" She was trembling in fear and held Di Yun's hand tightly.

Lu Kun shouted, "Quick, chase after the assailant!" Then with Zhou Qi, Sun Jun, and the others he quickly rushed out the window and shouted, "Capture the assailant! Capture the assailant!"

Di Yun watched as the eight disciples of the Wan clan chased after his teacher. At this moment he was truly scared out of his mind, unsure of what to do. Qi Fang shouted again, "Father!" Her body was still trembling and she could not keep her balance. Di Yun quickly held onto Qi Fang so she wouldn't fall. He lowered his head and saw both of Wan Zhenshan's eyes were shut tight; his expression was ferocious and disgusting and must have suffered a great amount of pain before his death.

Di Yun could look no more, and said softly: "Martial sister, shall we go?"

Qi Fang had not replied yet when a voice was heard behind them, saying: "You two are accomplices of the assailant! You cannot go!"

Di Yun and Qi Fang turned around to look and saw a long sword aimed at Qi Fang's chest, it was Bu Yuan. Di Yun was enraged, but when he thought about it, he realized that it was his teacher who murdered his martial uncle, what more could he say? He only lowered his head and remained silent.

## Chapter 2 – Prison

Bu Yuan said coldly, “The two of you return to your respective rooms, once we catch Qi Zhangfa, you will all be sent to the officials.”

“This whole ordeal was caused by me and me alone, it does not concern my martial sister. If you want to kill someone, then kill me,” said Di Yun.

Bu Yuan pushed Di Yun hard on the back and shouted, “Go! This is not the time for you to play hero.”

Di Yun could only hear the shouts of “Capture the assailant!” from outside. His mind was boggled and really did not know what to do at this point. He could only obey and head back to his room.

“Martial brother, what... what do we do?” cried Qi Fang.

Di Yun sobbed. “I... I don’t know. I will confess to the crime along with master,” he suggested.

“Father... where could he be?”

Di Yun remained in his room. It had been over four hours have passed since the murder of Wan Zhenshan, yet he was still sitting on his chair motionless over the events that had occurred. He stared blankly at the half-burnt candle on the table.

At this point the ones who chased after Qi Zhangfa returned. He heard voices outside talking. “The assailant has already left the city, we couldn’t catch him!”

“Tomorrow we will head to Hunan, no matter what we must catch him to avenge our teacher!”

“I only fear that the assailant may perish in the realmn, we may not be able to find him even if we try.”

“Hmph, even if we have to chase him to the edge of the earth and the corner of the ocean, we will still catch him and shred his corpse into ten thousand pieces!”

“Tomorrow we will spread notices across the realm to invite the righteous men in the martial world to uphold justice. Together we will kill this ignoble criminal!”

“Right! Let us first kill the daughter of the assailant and that brat with the surname Di as a sacrifice to our teacher.”

“No, let’s wait until tomorrow when the county magistrate comes to examine the corpse before we decide.”

The Wan disciples kept discussing their plans outside. Di Yun wanted to call her martial sister and escape together, but thought: “She is still a young girl, roaming in the realmn, who can take good care of her? Should I run away with her? No... no! This disaster was caused by me, if I did not try to play hero and fight with the Wan disciples, then Uncle Wan would not be suspicious of my master completing whatever Liancheng Swordplay. But my teacher is an honest person, why would he steal the sword manual? The three stances were taught to me by the old beggar, but now my teacher has already committed a crime. Even if I reveal the truth now, nobody would believe me.

Even if they do believe me, what difference does it make now? I have committed a huge crime and it is all my fault. Tomorrow I must reveal the truth to everyone in defense of my teacher. But... but Uncle Qi was indeed killed by my teacher, how could this criminal record be erased? No, I can't escape now, I will remain here and take the blame for my teacher's actions. I will let them kill me instead!"

As he continued pondering the situation, faint footsteps were heard from the rooftop. Di Yun looked up and saw was a dark shadow heading from west to east. He jumped onto the rooftop and yelled out quietly, "Teacher!" but upon closer inspection, the shadow was tall and skinny, nothing like the build of his teacher. Following behind this shadow was yet another mysterious figure who had a blade in his hand.

He thought to himself: "Are they looking for my teacher? Maybe teacher is nearby and hasn't gone far yet." He was thinking when suddenly from the east a loud feminine scream was heard. Di Yun was startled. He grabbed his sword and got up. The first thought that came to his mind was: "Are they hurting my martial sister?" Following that, another yell from a girl was heard, screaming: "Help me!"

However this voice did not sound like Qi Fang's, so he felt a bit relieved knowing that his martial sister was not in danger. He got out from the window and from inside the room he again heard a girl screaming, "Help! Help!"

He quickly rushed over to the scene. From the east side of the house saw a bright light coming out from the window. He went near the window and saw a girl tied up on a bed. Two people were molesting her face while another was about to undress her. Di Yun did not recognize who the girl was, but saw that she was very scared and was trying to struggle herself free from the bed, crying loudly for help.

Although he was in quite a predicament himself, upon seeing such injustice he could not simply walk away. At once he jumped in through the window and with his sword he aimed at the chest of the man on the left. The man on the right threw a chair at Di Yun, while the one on the left drew his blade to slash him. Di Yun saw that both men's faces were covered by a black cloth, so all he could see were their eyes. He shouted: "You bold scoundrels! Leave your lives here!" Three stabbing sounds were heard.

The two men did not reply and instead each drew their blade. One said, "Brother Lu, pull back!"

The other said: "That Wan Zhenshan is lucky today, we will get him next time!" Both blades were held up aiming to strike Di Yun's head. Di Yun saw the strikes approaching and quickly dodged. One of the men kicked the table up to the air, it flipped over and the candle died. Now the room was completely dark, only the sounds of breathing could be heard. The two mysterious figures jumped out through the window. Some weapon sounds were heard and several tiles were thrown. In the darkness Di Yun could not see clearly. He knew that his lightness martial arts was not proficient so he did not pursue.

"One of them had the surname Lu, likely an accomplice of Lu Tong that probably came to seek vengeance. They don't realize that Uncle Wan is already dead," he thought.

Suddenly, the girl on the bed shouted: "Ow! That hurts! I was stabbed in the chest by a small blade! Quickly pull it out for me."

Di Yun was shocked. "The thief stabbed you?" he asked.

"Stabbed! Stabbed!" she cried.

"Let me light a candle so I can see clearly."

"Come over here, quickly!"

Di Yun heard her voice was quite frantic and panicky so he walked closer and asked, "What is it?"

Suddenly, the woman opened her arms and hugged him around the waist, then shouted loudly: "Help! Help!"

Di Yun was in even more shock now: he clearly saw that she was confined by ropes, now how could she release herself? He quickly stuck out his hand and wanted to release her grip, but the woman had a very strong grip on him, and he could not instantly pull himself away from her.

Suddenly, a bright light was seen from the window. Two torches were lit and one could see the paintings inside the room. Several people spoke at once: "What's going on? What's going on?"

The girl shouted: "A rapist! A rapist! He wants to rob me and rape me! Help!"

Di Yun urgently shouted: "You... you... how could you do this?" He stuck his hand out to push her body away. The girl originally had hugged him hard around the waist, but now used her full force to repel him, shouting: "Don't touch me! Don't touch me!"

Di Yun instantly retreated, when suddenly he felt a cold sensation at the back of his neck: a long sword was already aimed at him. He wanted to explain himself, but with a flash of light from the blade he suddenly felt excruciating pain in his right palm. He screamed loudly as his own long sword fell on the ground. He looked down and was so scared at what he saw that he almost fainted: the five fingers of his right hand were cleanly sliced off, fresh blood splattered everywhere like spring water. In utter confusion he squinted and saw faintly that it was Wu Kan who held the bloody sword, standing on the side.

All he could utter was, "You!" and kicked Wu Kan hard with his right leg. Suddenly, he was hit hard on his back by a fist, causing him to stagger in great pain. Now his whole body fell on top of the girl. The girl shouted again: "Help! Rapist!"

He heard Lu Kun's voice. "Capture him!"

Di Yun had actually never seen any other youngster not from the countryside, and only at this moment did he realize that he fell into a devious trap by a bunch of schemers. He quickly got up, turned his body over and wanted to attack Lu Kun, when suddenly he saw a pale face looking at him—it was Qi Fang.

Di Yun was speechless, and from Qi Fang's face he could make out that she was in great sadness, disbelief, and anger. He shouted, "Martial sister!"

Suddenly, Qi Fang's face turned bright red, she said: "Why... why did you do this?"

Di Yun felt his entire body overwhelmed with feelings of injustice. How could he explain himself now?

Qi Fang began to cry and said, "I... I should just die." She saw that Di Yun's right hand had all five fingers chopped off, so she felt great sympathy and pain for him. She clenched her teeth, tore off a piece of clothing from her garment and bandaged his wound. At this point her face turned snow white again. Di Yun was in so much pain that several times he almost passed out, but he forced himself to be conscious. He bit his lips so hard that they started to bleed. He could not utter a single word.

Lu Kun said: "Little martial mother, this bastard dared to show you such disrespect, let us kill him to help you relieve your anger."

This woman was actually was one of Wan Zhenshan's concubines. She covered her face with both hands and started crying. "He... he... he said many dubious and inappropriate things to me. He said that your teacher has passed away and told me to follow him. He said that Lady Qi's father was the murderer, and that will implicate him in the crime as well. He... he said that he has already collected a lot of gold and jewellery and asked me to live a new life with him. He said he would take care of me for the rest of my life..."

Di Yun's mind was overwhelmed with a million thoughts at once. "This is all lies... lies..." he mumbled.

"Go! Search that bastard's room!" Zhou Qi exclaimed.

Everyone carried Di Yun over to his room, with Qi Fang following closely behind. Wan Gui said: "Everyone do not be so disrespectful to Brother Di, the situation has not been cleared up yet, do not falsely accuse him of injustice!"

Zhou Qi angrily replied: "What is there that still isn't clear? This brat is a villain!"

"I think that he is not such a person."

"Did you not hear just now? Did you not witness what just happened?"

"I think he only had a few too many cups of wine, and is under drug influence," Wan Gui retorted.

After all these events, Qi Fang had long lost any opinion of the situation. Upon hearing that Wan Gui was helping to prove Di Yun's innocence, she felt grateful deep inside, and lowly said to herself: "Brother Wan, my martial brother... is indeed not that kind of person."

"Correct, I say he is only drunk, he would certainly not commit thievery," he said.

## Chapter 2 – Prison

During the conversation, the others have already carried Di Yun into his room. Shen Cheng began inspecting his room very carefully. He lowered himself and reached for a heavy bundle under the bed. The bundle rattled like gold clashing against each other. Di Yun felt a cold shiver and was confused as he saw Shen Cheng open the bundle. Inside it was packed full of gold and silver plates, flagons and wine cups. It was most certainly items from the Wan Family's wine banquet.

Qi Fang was shocked, she put out her hands and leaned against the table to support herself.

Wan Gui said some comforting words: "Sister Qi, do not panic, we will think of a solution."

Feng Tan removed the bedding and revealed yet another two hidden bundles. Shen Cheng and Feng Tan each opened one of the bundles: one was filled with silver ingots while the other was filled with jewellery and a bunch of gold rings. At this point, Qi Fang could no longer contain herself as she watched. Under extreme anger and depression, she felt like she wanted to kill herself. Since they were young, she and Di Yun have grown up together, and she had long treated him as her future husband. Never would she have guessed that her lover, in desperate times, would rather retreat and live in isolation with another woman. Was this wicked witch of a woman really so attractive? Or perhaps he was afraid he would be associated with her father's crimes and decided to run off on his own?

Lu Kun shouted loudly: "Little thief, your loot is all here, what excuses do you have now? He gave Di Yun two hard slaps, one on each cheek. Di Yun had both his arms held and locked tight by Sun Jun and Wu Kan so he had no way of retaliating. Both his cheeks immediately became swollen, and Lu Kun continued to punch Di Yun hard on his chest.

Qi Fang shouted: "Don't hit him! Don't hit him! Let us talk things over."

Zhou Qi said: "Kill this thief first, then we will report to the authorities!" As he said this, he hit Di Yun hard with a fist. Under great pain, Di Yun opened his mouth and spat out a mouthful of fresh blood.

Feng Tan drew his sword and said: "Let us severe his left hand and see if he ever dares to commit such misdeeds ever again!" Sun Jun acknowledged this and lifted up Di Yun's arm; Feng Tan was about to strike when Qi Fang shouted: "Ah!" urgently.

Wan Gui said: "Everyone, listen. Out of respect for me, let's just take him to the authorities and be done with it." Upon seeing Feng Tan slowly withdraw his sword, two streams of tears began to flow down Qi Fang's cheeks. She gave a glance at Wan Gui, her eyes full of gratitude.

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"5, 10, 15, 20..."

The guard was counting the number of strokes from the beating stick given to Di Yun hard on the back of his legs. Di Yun was held back by two guards while he was being beaten; the bamboo board was getting lower and lower as he was being hit. Compared to the inner pain he felt in his heart, the external pain from being hit was nothing—even the pain on his right palm was considerably painless.

He thought to himself: "Even Fang'mei thinks I'm a thief... even she thinks I'm a thief."

"25... 30... 35... 40..." Now the board fell on the ground. Di Yun's skin was bruised and cracked, fresh blood dripped on the board. Then he passed out.

When Di Yun woke up, he found himself in one of the prison rooms. He felt dizzy and exhausted still so he did not know where he was, nor did he know how much time has passed since the incident. Gradually, he felt the intense pain in his right palm where his five fingers were sliced, as well as the pain on his back, legs, and hip from the beating earlier. He wanted to turn his body over so the painless parts would be on the ground, when suddenly, he felt indescribably excruciating pain on both his shoulders, and he fainted again.

He woke up again several times. The first sound he heard was the sound of his hoarse moaning, followed by intense pain coming from all parts of his body. But why was his shoulder in so much pain, more than anything else? Why was the pain so excruciatingly unbearable? He could only feel indescribable fear. After a long time, he still did not dare to lower his head to look at himself.

He thought: "Perhaps both my shoulders were pierced by someone?" Suddenly, he heard the sound of iron chains softly clashing. As he looked down, he could see that two iron chains tied both his shoulders. Under his fright, when he looked down to see, he was so afraid that it caused his whole body to shake.

After a while, the pain on his shoulders became even worse. Then he realized that the two iron chains actually pierced *through* his scapula. Along with the iron chains on his hands and the ones that tied his ankles, all these chains were locked together. Piercing the scapula, as he once heard his master say, was one of the worst possible punishments given by the prefecture to only the most unrighteous and evil of men. No matter how high your martial arts are, once your scapula is pierced, you cannot even unleash a fraction of your strength. At that instant, countless number of thoughts came to Di Yun at once: "Why treat me this way? Do they really think I am a huge criminal? I am innocent, how can the magistrate not see through this?"

At the court of the magistrate, he once fully explained the entire incident, but the concubine of Wan Zhenshan, Tao Hong, insisted that he was the one who committed the misdeeds and nobody else. Furthermore, the eight disciples of Wan Zhenshan amongst others also attested to her claims. Indeed, they did see him hug Tao Hong, then they discovered the hidden loot from underneath the bed, and even more from beneath the bedding. Not even to mention the guards in the prefecture, in Jingzhou the name of the Wan family held great status and prestige, which foolish thief would have any ideas of looting them?

Di Yun remembered that the magistrate had a handsome face full of sincerity. He believed that the magistrate was only convinced by these words for the moment, and caused the suffering of an innocent man. Eventually, the case will come to a resolution. But nevertheless, the five fingers on his right hand had been chopped off completely, how could he ever wield a sword again?

He felt his heart overwhelm with anger and his stomach fill with sadness. Without regards to the pain, he stood up and declared: "I'm innocent! I'm innocent!" Suddenly, his leg became limp and he fell on the ground. He tried to get back up and stand straight, but fell over once again. He lied on the ground and continued to shout: "I'm innocent! I'm innocent!"

## Chapter 2 – Prison

Suddenly a cold voice could be heard speaking: “Having your scapula pierced, your entire martial arts inert, haha... haha! The price to pay indeed wasn’t small.”

Di Yun did not care who spoke, nor did he care what that person’s intention was, he only continued to shout: “I’m innocent! I’m innocent!”

A gaoler walked by his cell and scolded: “What are you yelling for? You better shut up!”

Di Yun shouted: “I’m innocent! I’m innocent! I want to see the magistrate, he will correct this injustice.”

The gaoler shouted: “Are you going to shut up or not?”

Di Yun yelled even louder.

The gaoler laughed coldly and turned around to fetch for a wooden bucket, then he turned his head and threw the wooden bucket at Di Yun. Di Yun sensed an extreme foul smell and could not dodge, his whole body instantly became wet—it was a bucket of urine. The urine spread over his body and caused excruciating pain to his already agonizing wounds. His vision turned dark and he fainted again.

Subconsciously he had a high fever, sometimes he shouted “Teacher! Teacher!” while other times he shouted: “Martial sister! Martial sister!” Over a period of three days, the gaoler brought him coarse rice daily, but he felt quite unconscious and could not help himself to even a single bite.

On the fourth day, the fever in his body slowly began to disperse. As well, the numerous wounds in his body became numb and no longer caused as much suffering as it once did. He recalled that he was declaring his innocence, so opened his mouth widely again and shouted: “I’m innocent!” But at this time his voice was soft and incredibly weak; he barely had enough energy to utter any words.

He sat for a while and his eyes darted around the prison cell which he had previously disregarded. The prison was about a ten-foot squared stone house. The walls were made with tiles of rough and large stones and the floor was also made with large stones. In the corner was the wooden bucket from before, he could still smell the unpleasant scent emitted from it.

He turned his head, and saw that in the middle of the four corners of the room, there was a pair of very fierce eyes staring at him. He trembled as he did not expect that in the room would be another person besides himself. He saw that this man had a face full of facial hair, his hair was long and messy and hung down from his head to his neck. The man’s clothes were so ripped it was as if it belonged to a savage beast in the wilderness. The man’s hands were shackled by fetters just as he was, as well as the iron chain which also pierced through the man’s scapulas.

The first emotion that came to Di Yun was that of joy, and he gave a faint smile, thinking: “There is actually someone in this world equally as unfortunate as myself.” But then he switched thoughts: “This man looks quite ferocious, he is most likely a cold-blooded and ruthless villain who committed arson and murder. He got what he deserved, but I’m innocent!” His thoughts were interrupted as tears began to drip from his eyes.



Throughout all the pain and suffering he received since going to prison, he had always remained strong and would not shed even a single tear. But at this point he could hold back no longer, for his tears streamed uncontrollably down his face. He decided to let it out and cried loudly.

The bearded man sneered: "Very nice performance, well done! Are you an actor?"

Di Yun ignored the man and continued to cry loudly. He heard the sound of footsteps and thought that the gaoler was carrying another bucket of urine. Even if Di Yun's character was more stubborn, he would not want to clash with the gaoler, so he slowly retracted his tears and cried softly. The gaoler looked at him and suddenly said: "Little thief, you have a visitor."

Di Yun felt both shocked and excited at once, he quickly said: "Who... who is it?" The gaoler did not reply and instead produced a large chain of keys from his garment and opened the entrance iron door. He heard footsteps approaching, the gaoler walked through a long corridor and another sound of a door opening was heard, followed by the sound of a door closing and the sound of the rail as the footsteps of three people were heard approaching.

Di Yun was overjoyed and stood up instantly. His legs felt numb again and he was about to fall over but he found support from the stone walls. As soon as he moved he felt immense pain from the chains piercing his scapula, but held no regard for it amidst his excitement. He shouted: "Teacher! Martial sister!" In the entire world, only his master and martial sister were close to him. Naturally, he thought the sound of the footsteps of the other two people must be his master and martial sister.

As the three figures approached, he shouted "Tea..." but could not utter the "cher" as he opened his mouth and could not swallow. Three figures entered through the door. The first was the gaoler, the second was a handsome young man dressed in a gorgeous attire—Wan Gui, and the third was Qi Fang.

Qi Fang shouted: "Martial brother! Martial brother!" She threw her hands against the iron fence of the cell.

Di Yun walked one step forward and saw that she was dressed in new attire, different from the attire they had brought from the countryside. He did not walk another step, but he saw that her eyes were red. She cried: "Martial brother, martial brother, you... you..."

Di Yun questioned: "Where is teacher? Did... did you find his honour?" Qi Fang shook her head, her tears rustled to the floor in the process. Di Yun continued: "Are... are you well? Where are you living?"

Qi Fang choked while she spoke. "I have nowhere to go. I am temporarily living in the Wan residence..."

Di Yun was alarmed. "That is a harmful place, you definitely cannot stay there! Quick... quickly move out."

Qi Fang lowered her head and said softly: "I... I have no money. These past few days... every day at the prefecture, Wan Gui spent money... to rescue you."

## Chapter 2 – Prison

Di Yun grew even more frustrated and yelled: “I did not commit any crimes, why would I need him to spend money for me? How will we repay them in the future? Once the magistrate has fully examined the case over and realized my innocence, he will set me free.”

Qi Fang began to cry again. She said bitterly: “Why... why did you do such things? Why... why did you leave me?”

Di Yun became startled, but now he realized what was going on. At this point, his martial sister believed the words of the concubine Tao Hong. She believed that he was the one who stole the gold and jewellery. In his entire life he gave Qi Fang his utmost respect and love and would always submit to her, telling her everything that she wanted to know, discussing anything that she wanted. Little did he realize that when tragedy befell, she was no different from any other person. They all believed that he wanted to rape the girl and steal the money. They all believed that he would actually commit such atrocious acts.

At this moment, the emotional pain he felt caused over a hundred times more suffering and hurt than his physical wounds. He wanted to speak: he had a million things he wanted to explain to Qi Fang, but his throat suddenly became plugged, and he could not even utter a single word. He used all his strength and his ears flushed red, but his throat and tongue would not move and he could not emit any noise.

Qi Fang saw the terrifying expression on his face and became afraid. She turned her head and would not look at him. Di Yun used all his strength but still he could not utter a single word. When he suddenly saw that Qi Fang had turned her head not facing him, he could not help but feel great emotional suffering. He thought: “She hates me now... hates me for leaving her for another woman... hates me for stealing gold and jewellery... hates me for wanting to run off on my own upon trouble... martial sister, martial sister, if you don’t believe me, then why come and see me?” He no longer dared to look at Qi Fang, and slowly turned his body, facing the wall.

Qi Fang turned her head and said: “Martial brother, what happened in the past cannot be changed. We can only hope we can soon... soon receive notice of father’s whereabouts. Brother Wan will... will come up with a way to get you out of here...”

Di Yun thought: “I don’t need his help.” He also wanted to say: “Don’t live with him!” But the more he used his strength, the more his muscles tightened up, and he could not speak. His body stopped shaking, and the iron chains made clashing sounds.

The gaoler rushed and said: “Time’s up. This is a prison for those under death row, designed to punish the greatest of criminals. You guys aren’t supposed to be here to begin with. If the uppers find out about this, we will be in deep trouble. Miss, this man does not have any chance to get out of here, and he’s also handicapped now. You should forget about him and marry a wealthy and handsome gentleman!” As he said this he glanced over at Wan Gui, and gave a dirty snicker.

Qi Fang begged: “Sir, I have some things I wish to speak with my martial brother.” She extended her hands to the iron fence and pulled on Di Yun’s sleeves. She spoke softly: “Martial brother, don’t worry, I will most certainly beseech Brother Wan to rescue you, and then we will look for my father together.” She placed a bamboo basket inside the cell and said: “There’s some bacon, fish, and fried eggs there, as well as two taels of silver. Don’t worry martial brother, I will visit you again tomorrow...”

The gaoler became annoyed and said: "Lady, if you don't leave now, I won't be nice anymore!"

Wan Gui added: "Brother Di, don't worry. Your problems are my problems. Younger brother will try his best to request the magistrate to set your punishment as low as possible."

The gaoler continued to rush the two of them. Qi Fang could do nothing but take her leave slowly. With each step she turned her head to look back at Di Yun, but saw that his body was as still as a stone, his head still facing the stone wall opposite of her. All Di Yun saw was the various bumps on the stone wall. He really wanted to turn his head and see Qi Fang's figure from behind, as well as shout, "Martial sister!", but he could not speak out. Even his neck was straight and stiff. He heard the footsteps of three people walking away, the sounds slowly getting fainter. He heard the door unlock and open, followed by the sound of the door closing. Then he heard the footsteps of the gaoler returning, and thought to himself: "She said she would come and see me again tomorrow. Alas, I will have to wait a full day before I can see her again."

He extended his hands to reach for the food left behind, when suddenly another long and hairy hand extended over and grabbed the bamboo basket—it was the ferocious criminal from earlier. Di Yun could only watch as the man started eating the bacon in the basket.

Di Yun shouted loudly: "That's mine!" Suddenly he could speak, and thought it was very awkward. He walked forward a step to try and take the basket back, but the prisoner shoved him back with his hands and Di Yun could not keep his balance, moved back a few steps and with a loud bang, he hit his head hard on the stone wall. At that point he understood the true meaning of the phrase "Pierced scapula, useless person."

The second day Qi Fang did not come to visit him. Nor the third day, nor the fourth day.

Day after day, Di Yun anxiously awaited and ended each day in disappointment. By the tenth day, he was nearly driven insane by frustration. He shouted and screamed, banged his head on the wall, but Qi Fang still did not come. All that came out of his howling was a bucket of urine from the gaoler and a harsh beating from the ferocious prisoner.

Half a month passed, and he finally became a bit more settled. In fact, he did not even speak anymore. One night, four gaolers suddenly entered the prison, each wielding a sabre, and brought the ferocious prisoner out.

Di Yun thought: "Are they taking him out to be executed? That would probably be a relief for him, for he no longer has to suffer in here, nor do I have to suffer his beatings any longer."

He was in a deep sleep when suddenly he heard the sounds of iron chains scratching against the floor; the four gaolers brought the prisoner back to his cell. Di Yun glanced over at the prisoner and saw that his entire body was covered in blood, evidently given a harsh beating by the gaolers. The prisoner fell on the ground and went unconscious. Di Yun waited for the four gaolers to leave. From the moonlight shining through the prison cell, he could see the prisoner's face, arm, and legs were all full of bloody bruises as a result of being whipped. Although Di Yun was always beaten by this man, when he saw this man's current state he could not help but feel a bit of sympathy. He fed him some water from a bowl he had.

## Chapter 2 – Prison

The prisoner slowly awoke. When he opened his eyes and saw Di Yun, he immediately lifted his iron chain and smacked Di Yun hard on the head. Di Yun had no energy, but he reacted to the situation quickly and made a clever dodge. However, he did not predict that the prisoner's arms did not extend fully, and with a "peng" sound he changed directions and hit him hard on the waist. Di Yun could not keep his balance and fell forward to the right. Since his hands and feet were both connected to the chain that pierced his scapula, he felt agonizing pain. He was shocked and angry at the same time, and could not resist yelling: "You're insane!"

The prisoner laughed: "Your psychological tricks will not work on me. You should have given up on any ideas a long time ago."

Di Yun felt as if the ribs on his waist were about to crack. He was in so much pain that he could barely speak. He said: "You lunatic, you can barely protect yourself. Why would I have any ideas about deceiving you?"

The prisoner kicked forward with his left leg and hit Di Yun's spine, then with his right leg kicked him hard several times. "I see that you are only just a young thief and have not committed too many crimes, only that you are under orders from someone else, otherwise I would kick you to death without regret."

Di Yun grew so furious that he forgot the pain in his body, thinking that he was already unfortunate for being falsely accused for crimes he did not commit; now even worse, he was stuck in the same prison cell with an unreasonable lunatic. It was indeed bad luck upon bad luck.

On the full moon of the second month, the prisoner was once again brought out by four gaolers each wielding sabres. He was beaten once again and returned to his cell. This time, Di Yun conditioned himself and no matter how much pity and sympathy he felt for the man, he dared not approach him. But even then it did not matter, for the prisoner—before even catching his breath and recovering from his injuries—proceeded to beat him, shouting: "You scoundrel, even if you spied for another ten years, I will still not be fooled by you! People beating your ancestors, your ancestors beat your descendants! To think that you were born into this world, your ancestors must have sinned greatly." Di Yun was tortured by the prisoner. No matter what he felt it was all Di Yun's fault. Punching and kicking, the prisoner screamed and cursed at Di Yun for more than half a day.

From then on, every time it came near the full moon of the month, Di Yun feared for the worst, for he knew that he would soon inevitably be beaten. Indeed, on the fifteenth of every month, the prisoner was escorted out by four gaolers and tortured, only to briefly return the beating on Di Yun. Thanks to Di Yun's youthful body and build, although he was severely beaten once a month, he did not collapse. He began to wonder: "My scapula has been pierced by the iron chain, and there is no strength in my body. Yet how come this lunatic who also has his scapula pierced, can muster up so much strength to torture me?" Sometimes Di Yun almost collected enough courage to ask him, but he would always be beaten. As a result, he no longer said a single word to him.

It went on like this for several more months. Winter passed and spring came. Having been imprisoned for over a year, Di Yun began to grow accustomed to prison life; the pain and anger in his heart and body had become numb. For trying to avoid the brawl of the prisoner, he did not dare to even look at him. As long as he did talk to him or look at him, except for the nights of the full moon, the lunatic would not beat him.

Early one morning, before Di Yun was awake, he heard the soft chirpings of swallows outside the prison, which suddenly made him recall the past when he and Qi Fang would used to watch the songbirds fly to their nest. His heart became sour and it went away along with the birds. He could only watch through the window several dozen feet high as a pair of birds flew away together. He had nothing to do day and night and always had thoughts about escaping through the balcony window, trying to figure out who lives there. However, the window was shut tightly, and on top of the window there would always be a basket of fresh flowers. At this time of the day the spring sun shone through the window and on the sill was placed a basin of jasmines.

His mind was boggled with many thoughts when suddenly he heard the lunatic let out a deep sigh. For the past year, the lunatic either gave crazy laughs or scolded people, he had never sighed before. A hint of sadness and gentleness could be heard through his sighing. Di Yun could not resist and turned his head over. All he saw was the lunatic sitting in the corner with the hint of a smile from the corner of his mouth, his eyes focused on the basin of jasmines on top of the window sill. Di Yun felt that the man was not putting forth his true emotions, and hence turned around and dared not to look back at him.

Ever since then, Di Yun would check the expression of the lunatic every day. He saw that the lunatic would always stare gently at the basin of fresh flowers on the window sill—from the jasmine flowers and roses of spring, to the lilacs and impatiens of the summer. For over half a year, the two of them did not speak more than a sum of ten words. The beatings on the days of the full moon also became periodic. Di Yun realized that as long as he did not utter a single word, the lunatic's temper would be much less severe, and consequently the strength of his punches and kicks were less damaging. He thought: "In another few years, I probably won't even remember how to speak anymore."

However, the madness of the lunatic had an advantage too, for it even scared the gaoler from talking in the cell. Sometimes the lunatic would even scold the gaoler, and consequently he would not receive food for the day, so he would instead steal Di Yun's food. Other times, neither of them would receive food, and the lunatic would stay hungry for days and not care.

One year on the fifteenth day of the eleventh month, after the lunatic was given a harsh beating as usual, he suddenly caught a fever, and in his unconsciousness uttered some nonsensical words. Di Yun could make out that he would often say these few words, either "double flower" or "wounded heart".

Di Yun did not pay much attention at first, but come afternoon, he heard him constantly shout: "Water, water! Give me water to drink!" Di Yun could not resist and decided to pour some water from his bowl to help the prisoner. He got close to him, but he was completely alert in case the lunatic would strike with both hands. Luckily, this time he drank the water without getting angry, and promptly fell asleep.

Later that night, four gaolers suddenly appeared and beat up the lunatic again. When he returned this time, his groaning was weak and faint. One of the gaolers said sternly: "If he insists on not speaking, we will beat him up again tomorrow." Another gaoler said: "Since he is unconscious, we should continue to put pressure on him. If he insists on not speaking then he will soon end up in hell. That can't be good."

Di Yun had been living with the lunatic for quite some time and had watched him endure the worst of pain and suffering. He really did not wish for him to die at the hands of the gaoler. On the seventeenth, Di Yun fed him water four or five times. In the last time, the lunatic nodded his head to express gratitude. Since entering prison, this was the first time that Di Yun saw the lunatic express any form of good feelings, and at that moment, Di Yun felt warmth in his heart filled with indescribable joy.

That day, after the second watch<sup>3</sup>, the four gaolers came as expected and opened the cell door. Di Yun thought that if the lunatic were to be beaten again in such a short interval, he would most likely die. He gathered his courage and jumped in front of the cell door, shouting: "Don't come in!"

A gaoler with a big build approached him and scolded, "Stupid prisoner, move out of the way!"

Di Yun could not gather any strength in his hands so instead he lowered his head and bit the gaoler hard on the middle and index finger of his right hand. Blood began gushing out of his wounds. The teeth sunk deep into the bones and the fingers nearly cracked. The gaoler was shocked beyond measure, and immediately turned around and jumped out of the cell. He slipped and dropped his sabre on the ground.

Di Yun quickly lowered himself and grabbed the sabre, screamed loudly and hacked three times. Although he did not have much energy in his hands, but with the sabre replacing the sword, the stances were still quite exquisite. A fat gaoler rushed forward with his sabre and Di Yun moved to the side. With a stance of "Mother and Brother Loses Salt, The Long Goose Salts Circular Wings" (it was actually "The Lonely Straight Smoke Desert, The Long River Sunset Falls"), the blade rotated in a circular motion and stabbed the gaoler's leg. The gaoler was so scared that he rolled out of the way.

When the four gaolers saw that Di Yun was as wild and fierce as a tiger, they were afraid to get too close. Instead they stood outside the cell and started cursing at Di Yun's eighteen generations of ancestors, uttering every profanity they could think of. Di Yun remained silent and stood guard in front of the cell door. Surprisingly, the four gaolers did not call for reinforcements. After a while, they realized that they could not fight their way in so they cursed and left.

In the four days following the incident, the gaolers did not bring them food or water. By the fifth day, Di Yun was so thirsty that he could not resist anymore. The lunatic's lips were even more charred. He suddenly said: "If you pretend to kill me, that bitch will bring some water for sure."

Di Yun did not understand what the lunatic was trying to say, but thought to himself: "I don't care if this works or not, but I must try!" Then he shouted loudly: "If you don't give us water now, I will hack this lunatic into pieces." He turned the sabre and made some loud impact noises against the iron fence.

Suddenly he saw a gaoler rush through frantically and yelled: "If you even dare touch a single hair on his head, I will poke ten thousand holes on your body with my blade!" Following that, the gaoler brought some clean water and cold rice.

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<sup>3</sup> A watch is one of the twelve two-hour periods in a day. The first watch starts from 9 P.M. to 11 P.M. The second watch is from 11 P.M. to 1 A.M.

Di Yun and the lunatic began to eat. Di Yun asked: "He wants to torture you, but yet he is afraid that I will kill you. What kind of reasoning is that?"

The lunatic opened his eyes, lifted his bowl, smashed it hard against Di Yun's head and said: "You think that just because you are pretending to get on my good side that I will fall into your trap?" *Crack!* The bowl shattered to pieces.

Di Yun's forehead began to drip with fresh blood. He backed off and thought to himself: "This man is going crazy again!"

From then on, on the day of the full moon every month, the gaolers tortured the lunatic as usual, but upon his return, he would no longer unleash his wrath on Di Yun. The two rarely spoke words, but if Di Yun gave more than a few glances at the lunatic, he would be reprimanded with a hard fist. The only time the lunatic showed any signs of kindness or peace was when he looked at the fresh flowers placed outside the high windows of the cell.

By the spring of the fourth year, Di Yun no longer held any hopes of leaving the prison, but in his dreams he still constantly thought of his teacher and his martial sister. Although the image of his teacher gradually blurred over time, the image of his martial sister—her graceful and stalwart body, her rosy red cheeks, and her large black eyes—remained as clear as it was over three years ago.

He no longer dared to have any ideas of leaving prison to reunite with his martial sister. Every day he secretly prayed to Bodhisattva<sup>4</sup>, wishing that even if his martial sister would visit him once, he would be willing to suffer the tortures of the lunatic every single day.

Qi Fang never came.

One day, someone came to visit him. This person was a handsome young man who wore elegant silk clothes. He laughed: "Brother Di, do you still remember me? I am Shen Cheng." It had been over three years since they last saw each other. He grew a lot taller, to the point where Di Yun could barely recognize him.

Di Yun's heart began to pound hard, as he knew there was a chance he could get some information from him about his martial sister. "Where is my martial sister?" he asked.

Shen Cheng sent a basket over the iron fence and laughed: "This is from my older sister-in-law, Brother Wan's wife. Everyone did not forget our old companion. Today is a propitious day, and as such she asked me to deliver two full chickens, four trotters, and sixteen happy cakes for you."

Di Yun quickly asked: "Who is Wan's wife? What propitious day?"

Shen Cheng chuckled, his face let out a cunningly deceitful expression. "Brother Wan's wife is exactly your martial sister, Lady Qi. Today is the propitious day of their obeisance to marriage. She told me to deliver you these cakes and meats, isn't that quite enough friendship?"

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<sup>4</sup> An enlightened being in Buddhism.

Di Yun jumped up in a flash and clung hard onto the iron fence with both his hands. He shouted: “You... you speak nonsense! My martial sister, how... how would she marry the one with the surname Wan?”

Shen Cheng laughed. “My teacher was stabbed hard by your teacher. Fortunately, he did not die and proceeded to recover from his injuries. What happened in the past, we let bygones be bygones. Your martial sister lived in the Wan residence for the past three years, and with all the dear and sweet talk, who can say... who can say... hehe. Next year they’re guaranteed to expect a gorgeous and healthy baby.” Even though Shen Cheng aged a little, his playful and glib personality did not change one bit.

Di Yun’s ears felt a buzzing sound and he could only hear himself say: “Where is my teacher?”

He also seemed to hear Shen Cheng laugh as he said: “Who knows? He knows that he’s a wanted man, and naturally would run as far away as he can. Would he dare come back?” And seemed to hear Shen Cheng laugh and say: “Sister-in-law told you to continue to stay here in peace. Perhaps after she bears three sons and four daughters, she will come visit you.”

Di Yun suddenly roared: “You speak nonsense, nonsense! You... you... you’re full of shit!” He knocked the basket away. The cake, trotters, and warm chickens fell all over the floor.

Then he saw that in each and every happy cake marked the eight words: “Wan and Qi’s Marriage, Love for All Seasons.”

Di Yun did not want to believe Shen Cheng’s words, but now how could he not believe it? He drowsily heard Shen Cheng laugh: “Sister-in-law said that it’s unfortunate you could not attend to the wedding to drink a cup of wine...”

With both hands Di Yun clung hard against the iron fence. In an instant he extended his hands beyond the fence and held a firm grasp on Shen Cheng, strangling him. Shen Cheng was startled and wanted to escape, but Di Yun suddenly summoned such formidable strength that he was strangling him even harder. Shen Cheng’s face turned from red to purple, and with both his he tried to free himself, but he could not escape.

The gaoler quickly rushed to the scene, held Shen Cheng’s body with both arms and pulled hard. Only after he used all of his energy did he manage to save Shen Cheng’s life. Di Yun sat down on the ground without speaking or moving. The gaoler pranced in the cell and gleefully picked up the bits and pieces of cake and chicken on the ground. Di Yun stared at him but did not care.

That night on the third watch, he ripped off some pieces of his garment and made it into a rope. He tied a knot on it and using the support of the iron fence he climbed up, sticking his head in the noose. He no longer felt sad, nor did he feel hatred, for in his life there was no longer any love, and this would be the quickest and easiest way to end his misery once and for all. He let go and the noose on his neck began to feel tighter and tighter, until he could no longer breathe. After a while, he lost consciousness.

Later he regained consciousness, and felt a big hand exerting immense pressure on his chest. He saw the hands pushing up and down exerting force, and he felt some air entering through his nose.



He did not know how much time passed, but eventually his eyes slowly opened. He saw in front of him a face full of facial hair; the face suddenly cracked into a smile.

Di Yun could not help but regain his anger. He thought to himself: "No matter what I do, you are always against me. Even now that I want to die, you aren't willing to let me die in peace." He had the intent to get up and fight with the lunatic, but he felt much too weak, and he could not exert any force.

The lunatic laughed: "You stopped breathing for over an hour. If I had not used my special martial arts technique, under heaven there is no second person who can save you."

Di Yun shouted in a fit of rage: "Who wants to be saved? I don't want to live."

The lunatic was elated and said: "I do not want you to die, hence you will not die." The lunatic laughed as he looked at Di Yun. After a while, he moved closer to him, and spoke in a low voice: "My technique comes from the Heavenly Glow Manual, have you ever heard of it?"

Di Yun replied in anger: "I only know that you are a heavenly psychopath. What heavenly glow or not heavenly glow, I have never heard of."

Now that Di Yun thought about it, he felt it was quite strange, for this time the lunatic did not express any emotions of anger, and instead gently hummed a ditty. He extended his hands and pressured Di Yun's chest, a push and a release—just like a bellow—and helped circulate the air to his lungs. He said in a low voice: "You are very fortunate to be alive. I have practiced the arts of the Heavenly Glow for a dozen years, and it wasn't until two months ago did I complete it. If you had sought death two months ago, I could not have saved you."

Di Yun began to feel depressed again as the thought of Qi Fang marrying Wan Gui entered his mind. He wished that he could have just died then and there. He gave a cold stare at the lunatic and said: "I don't know how much I sinned in my previous life, that this life I would have to meet a psychopath like you."

The lunatic laughed and replied: "I am very happy, venerable brother. These past three years I have mistaken your intentions. I, Ding Dian, formally apologize to you!" As he said this he knelt on the floor and gave three loud kowtows.

Di Yun sighed and said softly, "Lunatic!" and did not care for him anymore. But he slowly turned his body and thought: "He calls himself Ding Dian, perhaps his surname is Ding, with a given name Dian. I have been imprisoned with him for three years, but I don't even know his name." He became curious and asked: "What is your name?"

The lunatic replied: "My surname is Ding, the illiterate Ding. My name is Dian, the Dian from the three graves and five codes. My suspicions were too great. All this time I thought you had bad intentions, and for the last three years I really gave you much pain and suffering. I have wronged you in too many ways."

Di Yun thought that what the man said was reasonable and did not have the least bit of insanity. He asked: "Are you really crazy or not?"

Ding Dian dejected and did not reply. After a moment, he gave a long sigh and said: “Whether I am crazy or not, that is hard to say for sure. I only wish for inner peace. What other people see, I hope they will not believe I am crazy to the point of unaccountability.” After a while, he gave some more comforting words: “Brother Di, your heart is filled with sufferings of injustice; I had already figured as much. If she doesn’t treat you with love or respect, why bring upon yourself so much pain to think of her? A gentleman does not suffer from the lack of a wife. In the future you will marry a woman that exceeds the greatness of your martial sister ten times over. What is there to feel bad about?”

Upon hearing these words, Di Yun wished to unleash all his sorrow and misery of the last three years like the pouring of mountain torrents and avalanches all at once. He felt his chest turn sour, and tears began to pour down his face. Later, he cried as hard as he could on Ding Dian’s arms. Ding Dian hugged him and gently caressed his long hair.

After three days, Di Yun’s emotions began to stabilize and he felt a bit vibrant. Ding Dian secretly talked and laughed with him, discussing the interesting stories of the realm to cure his boredom. But when it came time for the gaoler to deliver food, Ding Dian would shout and curse at Di Yun, his attitude no different from what it was before.

The person who once gave Di Yun endless pain and agony now suddenly became his good friend. If not for the incident of Qi Fang getting married being as unbearable as a poisonous centipede biting his heart out, what he felt right now must be heaven compared to his experiences in the past three years.

Di Yun once questioned Ding Dian, asking him why the latter used to think he harboured bad intentions, and why he suddenly revealed the truth. Ding Dian answered: “If you really harboured bad intentions, you would not hang yourself. I waited for your breathing to stop for a long while—a clear death, your body was about to become stiff—before I rescued you. Under heaven no one besides myself knows that I have completed my training in the formidable art of the Heavenly Glow. If not for this technique, there would be no other way to save you. Your suicide was real and most certainly not a plan to deceive me into trusting you.”

Di Yun asked: “You thought I was deceiving you? Why?”

Ding Dian only smiled and did not reply.

The second time Di Yun asked the same question, Ding Dian still did not answer. Di Yun no longer asked.

One night, Ding Dian whispered something to his ears: “My Heavenly Glow technique has the strongest internal energy foundation of any martial arts under heaven. Today, I will teach it to you. You must remember carefully.”

Di Yun shook his head and replied: “I won’t learn it.”

Ding Dian asked curiously: “In such circumstances, why won’t you learn it?”

Di Yun replied: "The days we spend here are not much better than death. The two of us have no chance of seeing life outside this prison. Even if my martial arts were higher it would not make a difference."

Ding Dian laughed. "You want to escape prison? How hard is that? I will teach you the basic mnemonics, remember them carefully."

Di Yun remained stubborn, for his suicidal tendencies had not completely vanished, so he insisted on not learning the technique. Ding Dian persuaded him with great persistence but it was in vain. He almost wished he could beat him into submission just like before.

Many days passed and the moon was full once again. Di Yun secretly felt worried for Ding Dian. Ding Dian could guess his emotions and said: "Brother Di, every month I suffer beatings from the gaolers. In the past, after my beatings, I would always unleash my anger out on you. You and I must not show any signs of friendship, or this will be bad for the both of us."

"Why?" asked Di Yun.

Ding Dian replied: "If they suspect that we have become friends, they will torture you instead of getting information out of me. If I beat you and curse at you, it will prevent you from being tortured by methods many times more cruel."

Di Yun nodded in reply. "You are right. This information is so important, you mustn't let me know about it for the fear that my tongue will slip and reveal it. Brother Ding, I am a rustic from the countryside, if I speak any nonsense and foil your plans, how can I ever forgive myself?"

Ding Dian replied: "You and I were imprisoned together for a long time. At first I thought you were sent by them as a spy, faking good intentions to deceive me in hopes of getting me to leak out information. And so I treated you with utmost disrespect and hatred, giving you the most painful of tortures. Now I realize that you are not a spy, but since they have imprisoned us together for the past three or four years without release, their intent is to expect you to be a spy, in hopes that you will get on my good side. If I reveal any information to you, they will torture you instead. They know that I will not speak no matter what, but against a young man like you, it will be much easier. You are a criminal under the magistrate, sent to the prefecture to be imprisoned, and naturally they could use this excuse to torture you."

On the evening of the fifteenth, four gaolers brought Ding Dian out of his cell. Di Yun felt troubled and awaited his return. When Ding Dian returned on the fourth watch, his eyes were blue and his nose was swollen, his body covered in fresh blood as usual.

Ding Dian waited for the four gaolers to leave before speaking in a low solemn tone. "Brother Di, the events of today were terrible and most unfortunate. One of my enemies recognized me."

"What?" asked Di Yun.

Ding Dian replied: "Every month on the fifteenth, the magistrate will issue a beating on me. But today someone came to assassinate the magistrate. When I saw that the magistrate's life was in jeopardy, I could not help but save him. But because my body was confined by handcuffs and

shackles, among the four assassins I only killed three. The fourth escaped, and that will most certainly cause trouble.”

Di Yun felt more and more strange, and asked continuously: “Why does the magistrate insist on beating you? Since the magistrate is so brutal, if someone has come to assassinate him, why would you save his life? Who was the assassin that escaped?”

Ding Dian shook his head and sighed: “I cannot tell you so many things at once, Brother Di. Your martial arts are frugal and you have no strength. In the future no matter happens, you should not offer your assistance.”

Di Yun did not reply, but thought to himself: “Does he think I with the surname Di is a coward? If you take me as a friend, under desperate circumstances, how can I not assist you?”

Thereafter, Ding Dian remained in silent contemplation. Except for the times where he would look up and stare at the flowers blooming outside the high window—where his face would show the slightest sign of a smile—all other times he would remain dull in thought.

On the late night of the nineteenth, Di Yun felt uncomfortably hot in his sleep. Suddenly, he heard two strange sounds. He opened his eyes and under the moonlight shone two stalwart men using a sharp weapon to destroy the iron fence outside the cell. Each of them wielded a sabre embraced close to his body. Di Yun was shocked, unsure of what to do, but he saw Ding Dian stood firm with a cold laugh.

The shorter man said: “The one with the surname Ding, our brothers have travelled from the edge of the sky to the corner of the ocean, searching for your whereabouts. Little did we know that you were hiding in an obscure prison in Jingzhou, like a tortoise shrinking its head into its shell. Thank heavens, we finally found you.”

The other man said: “Let’s get straight to the point. If you hand over the book, we brothers will not cause you any trouble. In fact, we will break you out of prison immediately.”

Ding Dian replied: “I do not have it. It was taken by Yan Daping 13 years ago.”

Upon hearing the three words “Yan Daping”, Di Yun’s heart spiked. He thought: “That is my second martial uncle, how is he involved in this?”

The short man shouted: “You think that just because you hid yourself in prison means you can get away from us? Go to hell!” He stroke forward with his sabre, the tip pointing at Ding Dian’s throat. Without dodging nor running, Ding Dian allowed the tip of the blade to get within a few inches of his throat, then at the last second, he ducked his body, which caused the shorter man to strike at the left side of the taller man. His elbow hit the taller man right in the stomach. The latter did not even let out a cry, and collapsed to the ground.

The short man aimed his sabre back at Ding Dian, giving two strikes in his direction. Ding Dian raised both his arms and blocked the blade with the iron chain. At the same time, his legs were moving frantically in all directions, and stepped on the body of the short man. The man spat out a huge volume of fresh blood and died immediately.

Upon seeing that Ding Dian killed both men empty-handed in a split second, Di Yun could not help but feel astonished. Even though he no longer possessed any martial arts, what he witnessed just now, he realized that even if his abilities were renewed, and with long sword in hand, he would not necessarily defeat the short man. And before the other man even joins in the fray, he would have died already. Their martial arts did not reveal any flaws in many stances, thinking that if the two men fought together, they would be quite formidable. Ding Dian also had his scapula pierced by the iron chain, yet he was still able to kill two formidable opponents in the matter of a few gestures. Di Yun admired him with utmost respect.

Ding Dian threw the two bodies out of the cell and began to sleep leaning on the wall. The iron fence had already been broken, so if the two of them wanted to escape, now would be a great opportunity. But Ding Dian did not even say a word, and Di Yun also did not think that the world outside was any better than prison life.

The next morning, the gaoler saw two dead bodies outside the cell and shrieked in shock and terror. Ding Dian stared at the opposite direction while Di Yun turned a deaf ear. The gaoler carried the corpses outside without even asking what happened the previous night.

Another two days passed, and Di Yun was awakened again by some strange noises. Feeling a bit hazy, he only saw that Ding Dian had extended both palms forward, matching them against a Taoist priest. The two stood there motionless. Di Yun had no clue that a Taoist had entered, nor did he know that the two of them were currently in an intense internal energy struggle. He once heard his teacher say that among the various forms of competing martial arts, competing internal energy is the most dangerous, for they would be exposed to any outside threat, and often the struggle would end in the life or death of one side. There was no easy way of stopping midway.

Under the starlight of the night, he saw the Taoist slowly moved forward one step, while Ding Dian slowly retreated one step backwards. After a while, the Taoist took yet another step forward, and Ding Dian moved another step backwards.

Di Yun saw that the Taoist was forcing his way through, slowly gaining the advantage. He was anxious and suddenly went towards the Taoist and slammed the latter's head hard with his iron chains. The iron chain hit the Taoist right on the top of his head, but from somewhere the Taoist managed to unleash some strength and with brute force caused Di Yun to lose his balance and fall straight down. Di Yun banged his head hard against the wall and fell flat on his ass. He extended his hands to support himself back up, but in the darkness he accidentally hit a bowl. With a crack, the bowl was smashed and water spilt all over his hands. He took the broken bowl and threw the half bowl of water on the back of the Taoist's head.

In truth, Ding Dian's internal energy was much superior to that of the Taoist's and he only wanted to test the depths of his newly mastered technique. Not knowing exactly how powerful the technique was, Ding Dian wanted to experiment with it and so he used the Taoist as his test subject. The Taoist had already begun to feel a bit weak in his veins and felt a little burned out. Now after being splashed by the half bowl of water, he was taken aback, and felt his opponent's internal rush through his entire body. *Kakakaka!* Several exploding sounds were heard as his ribs, forearm, and leg bones were broken in half. He stared at Ding Dian and said: "You... you have mastered the skills of the Heavenly Glow... under heaven... under heaven... this is unmatched..." He slowly cuddled into a ball and died.

## Chapter 2 – Prison

Di Yun felt his heart pounding frantically and said: “Brother Dian, your skills from the Heavenly Glow Manual is actually... is actually so powerful. Is it truly unmatched under heaven?”

Ding Dian gave a dignified expression and replied: “In a one-on-one battle, it is enough to rule the realm, but if the enemies attack all at once, it may not be enough to defeat them all. After the Taoist was crushed by my internal energy, he was still able to open his mouth and speak, which clearly shows that my martial arts have not yet reached the peak of perfection. Within three days, there will most certainly be truly formidable opponents visiting us. Brother Di, will you offer your assistance to me?”

Di Yun thrived in exhilaration. “I will do whatever big brother says, but I... I have lost my martial arts completely. Even if I still have some strength left, I am much too weak to be of any use.”

Ding Dian gave a faint smile and from the haystack picked up a blade that was left by the two assassins from the other day. “Cut off my beard and we will deceive them.”

Di Yun took the blade and cut off Ding Dian’s beard. The blade was quite sharp and even sliced a bit of skin off. Ding Dian collected the bits and pieces of his beard and held it firmly on the palms of his hands.

Di Yun laughed and said: “Won’t you miss the beard that you have so faithfully kept intact over the years?”

Ding Dian replied: “That is not the case. I want you to disguise yourself as me.”

Di Yun questioned: “Disguise as you?”

Ding Dian said: “That is correct. Within three days, our enemies will arrive. The five of them are not my match in a one-on-one battle, but if all five of them attack at once, they will prove to be quite impressive. I want them to mistake you for me, so when they focus all their energy on attacking you, I will unexpectedly ambush them.”

Di Yun whispered: “That... that... I’m afraid... is not very honourable.”

Ding Dian laughed heartily. “Honour, honour! In the realm everyone is full of trickery and deceit. Everyone will ambush and lame you in every way possible. If you treat others with honour, wouldn’t that just be seeking your own death?”

Di Yun replied: “Although this is true, but... but...”

Ding Dian said: “I ask you this: When you first entered prison, you cried loudly of injustice. I trust that you are indeed innocent, yet why have you been imprisoned here for over three years, without a way to prove your innocence?”

Di Yun said: “Mm, I have never understood the reason.”

Ding Dian laughed: “Whoever was the one who set you up, is also the one who is preventing you from leaving this place.”

Di Yun said: "That I never understood. I don't even know Wan Zhenshan's concubine Tao Hong, so naturally I have no misunderstandings or conflicts with her, so why did she frame me and cause me to lose everything that I had. Why did she cause me so much grief?"

Ding Dian asked: "How did they set you up? Tell me about it."

Di Yun continued shaving Ding Dian's beard as he told the story of how he went to Jingzhou to celebrate Wan Zhenshan's birthday, how he defeated the unrighteous Lu Tong, how he got in a fight with the eight disciples of the Wan clan, how his teacher stabbed his martial uncle and ran away, how someone harassed Wan Zhenshan's concubine, and how he tried to save her—he told him everything. The only part he omitted was the part where the old beggar taught him swordplay, because he swore an oath never to tell anyone about it. Besides, he did not consider this omission to affect his story at all, as it was mostly irrelevant.

From start to finish he told the entire story, and Ding Dian's beard was just about completely shaved off. Di Yun sighed a few times and said: "Brother Ding, the pain that I have to suffer every day, what good was it for? They insisted that my teacher killed Uncle Wan, yet Uncle Wan only suffered minor injuries and did not die. They imprisoned me for so many years and should have released me by now. To say they have forgotten about me is incorrect, for did the one with the surname Shen not come to visit me?"

Ding Dian moved his head to the side, looked at Di Yun in one direction and then another, and sneered.

Di Yun was puzzled and asked: "Brother Ding, did I say something wrong?"

Ding Dian sneered: "Right... right, everything is right. What is there that isn't right? If that wasn't how it was, then it wouldn't be right."

Di Yun became curious. "What do you mean?"

Ding Dian said: "Well, think about it. There was dumb kid who brought along a beautiful girl to my house. When I saw the girl I became infatuated, but the girl treats the dumb kid quite nicely. I want to claim the girl, and as such I must get rid of the dumb kid. What can I do?"

Di Yun secretly felt a hidden meaning of mischievousness in his tone and casually asked: "What way is there?"

Ding Dian replied: "If I use poison or a sword to kill the dumb kid, I will have set myself up as a criminal, and that will only cause me trouble. Furthermore, the beautiful girl is most likely a well-spirited girl, and does not have a death wish. In fact, she may even seek to avenge the kid, wouldn't that be a problem? If you ask me, I would send the dumb kid to the officials and have them lock him up, then the beautiful girl will follow me faithfully while hating the kid. How do we do this? First, we make it look like the kid has another love interest. Second, we make the kid appear to no longer like the beautiful girl. Third, we expose the kid doing some unrighteous deeds, and the girl will most certainly be filled with hatred."

Di Yun's entire body shook violently. "You... everything you said, it was all the one with the surname Wan... it was all Wan Gui's idea?"

Ding Dian smiled. “I did not see it with my own eyes, so how would I know? Your martial sister is quite pretty, is she not?”

Di Yun’s mind was at a loss, and he only nodded his head.

Ding Dian continued: “Ah, for the sake of getting on the lady’s good side, I naturally have to look busy, spending lots of silver to send to the prefecture, in hopes of coming up with a plan to set the kid free. The best case would be to have the lady come along with me to send the silver, so the lady can see everything for herself, she will naturally feel grateful. The silver sent to the official, the magistrate, and the prefect was not put to waste.”

Di Yun said: “Since he sent so much silver, wouldn’t it have some effect?”

Ding Dian said: “Naturally. Money talks, how can it not have an effect?”

Di Yun said: “Then why... why did they imprison me all this time and not release me?”

Ding Dian laughed. “What crime did you commit? The crimes they framed you for were only attempted rape and thievery. It wasn’t even arson or murder, so how severe can the crime be? They did not have to pierce your scapula, nor did they have to sentence you to life in prison. This was in fact the true intent behind sending so much silver. Excellent, this plan is flawless. Now the lady will live in my household, and even though the lady still thinks much of the dumb kid, can she really wait year after year and never get married?”

Di Yun lifted the sabre, and with a loud bang he smashed it on the floor. “Brother Ding, so the real reason they never set me free was because of Wan Gui’s silver.”

Ding Dian did not reply and looked up in deep thought. Suddenly, he creased his eyebrows and said: “There’s something wrong. This plan has a serious flaw in it, this is definitely wrong.”

Di Yun replied in anger: “What is wrong? My martial sister did end up marrying him, and if not for you, I would have committed suicide already. Is this not following the course of his plans?”

Ding Dian walked around the cell, constantly shaking his head, and said: “However there is still one glaring flaw. They were so careful in their planning, how could they not see this?”

Di Yun replied: “What is the flaw?”

Ding Dian replied: “Your teacher. After your teacher wounded your martial uncle, he fled. The name of ‘Five Cloud Hand’ Wan Zhenshan is known throughout Jingzhou, so the news should have spread in a matter of days that he did not die and was only wounded. Even if your teacher no longer has any face to see his martial brother, would he not send someone to escort your martial sister back home? Once your martial sister returns home wouldn’t that foil the careful and meticulous plans of Wan Gui?”

Di Yun clapped his hands hard on his legs and said: “Right! Right!” His hands were still in shackles, when he clapped his leg, the sounds of the iron chains vibrated in the air. He saw that Ding Dian’s



expression was rough, seemingly lost in his own thoughts, and then let out an expression of admiration.

Ding Dian turned his head and said softly: "Why did your teacher not retrieve his own daughter? There must be a very good reason for it. Wan Gui and the others should have already expected this, else they would not execute this plan. I have yet to figure out the trick behind this."

It was not until today that Di Yun finally realized the truth of his imprisonment over the years. He repeatedly slapped himself on the head, cursing himself for being so foolish. It only took Ding Dian a few moments to figure it out, yet over three years he did not even have the slightest clue.

After scolding himself for a while longer, he saw that Ding Dian was still in deep thought. "Brother Ding, you don't have to think about it so much. My teacher is an honest man from the countryside. Most likely he was afraid after wounding Uncle Wan, so he ran off in a very far and desolate place, hence he did not receive any messages from the realm. That must be it."

Ding Dian opened his eyes widely, stared at Di Yun, his face full of curiosity, then asked: "What? Your... your teacher is an honest man from the countryside... if he killed someone would he be so afraid that he would run away?"

Di Yun replied: "Correct, but my master's virtue and honesty was in vain, for Uncle Wan falsely accused him of stealing some sword manual from my grand-teacher. In a fit of rage, he could not resist attacking him, but really he is a good man."

Ding Dian laughed coldly and sat at the corner of the cell, humming a small tune. Di Yun asked: "Why are you laughing?"

Ding Dian replied: "Nothing."

Di Yun said: "There must be a reason. Brother Ding, please tell me."

Ding Dian said: "Very well! What is your teacher's nickname?"

Di Yun replied: "He is called 'Iron Lock Across the River.'"

Ding Dian asked: "And what is the meaning of it?"

Di Yun hesitated for a moment before replying. "I do not know the meaning behind this title. I assume that it refers to his profound martial arts and strong defense; the meaning is that his opponents cannot easily get through his defense."

Ding Dian laughed heartily. "Little brother, you are virtuous and honest, but 'Iron Lock Across the River' actually means that if one wants to go up one cannot go up, and if one wants to go down one cannot go down. Who among the older generation of pugilists would not know the meaning of his nickname? Your teacher is smart and variable, impressive to the max. Whoever makes him angry, he will think of nothing but revenge. His opponents are akin to a ship entangled in the heart of a river, splashing around in all directions, unable to move up or down. If you don't believe me, when you leave this prison in the future, you can research this yourself."

## Chapter 2 – Prison

Di Yun naturally did not believe him. He said: “When my teacher taught me swordplay, he was mistaken in his explanations. What ‘The Lonely Bird Rises from the Ocean, the Pond Does not Dare to Care’ he explained as ‘Brother Weng Shouts Up, Dare not Cross the Horizontal; what ‘The Sunset Reflects the Banner, The Horse Cries Soughing Winds’ he explained as ‘The Falling Mud Welcomes Big Sister, The Horse Blows a Little Wind.’ He is not even literate, how could he make such intelligent changes?”

Ding Dian sighed a few times and said: “Your teacher is quite knowledgeable, how would he explain the mnemonics incorrectly? He is marked by profound shrewdness, so there must be a reason behind the explanations. Why would he lie to his very own disciple? Outsiders will not know. Hehe, if not for your profound virtue and honesty, he may not have taken you in as his disciple. Let us talk about this no further. Come, let me stick this beard onto you.”

He lifted his blade and chopped off one of the arms of the dead Taoist. The Taoist had not been dead for long, so the cut caused blood to gush out everywhere. Ding Dian smudged the beard with blood and stuck it on to Di Yun’s cheeks and jaw.

Di Yun could smell the sanguinary aroma of blood and a cold shiver went down his spine. But upon thinking of Wan Gui’s evil plans, his teacher’s nickname, and many other things that he did not understand, he realized that the safest place in the entire world was in fact this very prison.

The following afternoon, 17 inmates entered the prison all at once. They were all tall, thin and not very old. Each one of them seemed to be a figure from the realm and the prison became fully packed. Di Yun saw more and more people arrive and became very cautious, for he knew that these people were here for Ding Dian. Ding Dian had originally said that five of his rivals would show up, but now 17 had shown up.

Ding Dian stared at the walls of the cell the entire time, not paying the slightest attention to what was going on around him.

The prisoners were quite noisy and shouted a lot, laughed loudly, and sometimes cursed at each other. Di Yun ducked his head and tried to listen to what they were saying. It turns out that these 17 people were from three different clans, talking about some valuable treasures. Di Yun gave a sideways glance to one of them, only to have them return expressions of contempt, so he became scared and quickly turned his head back. He thought: “I am disguised as Brother Ding, but I have lost my martial arts completely, if I engage battle, what should I do? No matter how strong Brother Ding is, he won’t manage to kill all of these people.”

Upon seeing that the sky was getting dark, one burly prisoner spoke loudly: “Let’s make it clear first, the ones in charge here will be the ones from the Dongting Sect. If anyone is not willing to submit, you should look at the insignia, and not waste any time causing trouble.”

There were a grand total of nine people from the Dongting Sect, hence they were the overwhelming majority. One grey-haired middle-aged man spoke in a cynical voice: “To see the insignia under your hands is fine, but since all of us are here, why not take this fight outside until we come to an understanding?”

The man replied: “We will fight in the courtyard then, do you think I’m afraid?” He extended his hands, grabbed onto the iron fence and pushed to the left. The iron fence was instantly bent out of

shape. Following that, he pushed on the right with his other hand, causing that fence to twist as well. His arm strength was astonishing.

The man was about to escape through the opening of the two bent fences he just made, when suddenly in front of him he saw a dazzling figure blocking the gap—it was Ding Dian. He did not speak and grabbed the man by the chest. The man was taller than Ding Dian by half a head, but upon being grabbed, he instantly became weak and could not dodge. Ding Dian threw his enormous body out the iron fence of the cell and dragged him to the courtyard. The man huddled on the ground and no longer made a move. He was dead.

The other people in the prison saw the odd shape of the man and became really afraid. Ding Dian casually grabbed another person and threw him out of the fence. He followed through and grabbed yet another and threw him out the fence. He did this continuously for a grand total of seven people; whoever was grabbed by him was killed instantly without so much as making a sound.

The ten remaining in the cell were scared shitless. Among them, three were so afraid that they hid themselves in the corner of the cell. The remaining seven decided to team up on Ding Dian at once, throwing many punches and kicks to his direction. Ding Dian did not fight back nor did he dodge. All he did was extend his hands to grab—he would always be successful in grabbing someone—and whoever he grabbed would be killed instantly. Whether or not they felt pain before death, Di Yun did not know. In an instant, all seven of them were dead.

The remaining three men still hiding in the corner were so afraid that they thought were going to get a heart attack. All at once, they dropped on their knees and begged for mercy. Ding Dian did not even look at their plea and simply threw each one of them out, one at a time, and they all died. Di Yun was left speechless and his eyes glared in extreme shock. He thought he was flurried in a dream.

Ding Dian slapped his hands together and sneered: “These people who don’t even qualify dared to attempt to steal ‘A Deadly Secret’!”

Di Yun did not know what he was talking about. “Brother Ding, what ‘A Deadly Secret’?”

Ding Dian seemed to feel as if he had regretted what he just said, but he did not want to make up lies to deceive him. He only laughed coldly several times but did not answer.

Di Yun saw that just a moment ago those 17 men were as alive as any man could be, and now it was but a few moments later, and they were all dead corpses scattered all over the floor. In his whole life he had never seen so many dead people grouped together at once. He let out a deep sigh. “Brother Ding, did all these people here deserve to die?”

Ding Dian replied: “To say they all deserved to die may be an overstatement, but they all harboured evil intentions. Had I not completed the elite skills of the Heavenly Glow and if they all attacked me at once, that could have caused a whole lot of trouble.”

Di Yun knew that what Ding Dian spoke was the truth. “You only casually grabbed each one of them and that was already enough to kill. Such magnitude of power I have never heard of. If I told my martial sister about it, she wouldn’t believe it...” As soon as he said this, he stopped talking and wanted to take back his words. He felt his heart turn sour, as if his chest was hit hard by a fist.

## Chapter 2 – Prison

Ding Dian did not laugh at him, but only sighed several times, and spoke randomly to himself. “Actually, although I have completed such exceptional martial arts, not everything always goes according to plan...”

Di Yun suddenly heard a sound and he pointed his fingers at one of the dead corpses in the hall.

Ding Dian asked: “What?”

Di Yun replied: “That person is not dead yet, I saw his legs move.”

Ding Dian was taken aback by his words, and only said, “For real?” As he said these two words, his voice began to tremble.

Di Yun said: “Just now I saw him move several times.” Then he thought to himself: “Although that person is not dead yet, he suffered major injuries, what’s the big deal? He can’t fight anymore anyway.”

Ding Dian creased his eyebrows, as if he was just faced with a very difficult problem. He walked out through the gap in the iron fence and observed outside. *Chi! Chi!* Two very miniscule hidden projectiles were rapidly fired, aiming for his eyes. It was fired by the man who was still alive. Ding Dian quickly moved backwards. The two sleeve arrows nearly skimmed his face; his nose could smell an unusual aroma, it was most likely the case that the arrows were poisonous. After firing the sleeve arrows, the person stood up and escaped to the roof of the building.

Ding Dian saw that the man’s lightness techniques were formidable. Since he was confined by iron chains, he was not mobile enough to chase after him. Afraid that the man would get away, he quickly grabbed one of the corpses on the ground, pointed it in an upwards direction, and threw it in rapid haste. With a loud bang, the head of the corpse smashed hard onto the waist of the escapee. The man’s left leg had just landed on the roof of the building, but upon being hit by the corpse, he lost his balance and fell over. Ding Dian rushed forward several steps and grabbed the man by the neck and brought him back to the prison. He extended his hands to check for any breathing through his nose and realized that this time the man had really died.

Ding Dian sat on the ground with both hands supporting each other and began to ponder. “How come I did not manage to kill that man earlier? What is the flaw in my martial arts? Perhaps I have not fully mastered the techniques of the Heavenly Glow?” For over half a day he pondered the reason behind his failure. Under frustration, he reached his hands out for the wound in the chest of the man he just killed. Suddenly, he withdrew his finger in a tenacious and soft manner. Ding Dian felt surprised and remarked: “Yes! Yes!” He tore apart the man’s clothes and exposed that the man was wearing a shiny black protective vest. Ding Dian exclaimed: “Yes, so that’s the reason. That nearly scared me to death.”

Di Yun asked for clarification. Ding Dian sliced up the man’s clothing and peeled off the black protective vest, then dragged the corpse out of the prison. He laughed and replied: “Brother Di, put this vest on you.”

Di Yun realized that the black vest was most likely something valuable, so he said: “This is older brother’s valuable, younger brother will not be greedy for it.”

Ding Dian replied: "If it is yours, will you not crave it?"

Di Yun could sense some severity in his tone and was afraid that he would be mad if he refused. "If big brother insists, then I will wear it."

Ding Dian spoke with a straight face. "I ask you, if it is not yours, do you want it?"

Di Yun said: "Only if the owner insists on giving it to me, otherwise I will not take it, else... else... if it doesn't belong to me, naturally I won't take it. If I crave so much other people's belongings, will that not make me a thief or robber?" Di Yun said this with a proud expression, and continued: "Brother Ding, you must understand, I was framed by others, hence I was held captive in here. My whole life I am free of guilt, I have never done anything unjust."

Ding Dian nodded his head in agreement. "Very good! Very good! My friendship with you was not made in vain. Now put this vest on you."

Di Yun could not express any more negativism, so he took off his upper garment and wore the black vest over his body. On top of that he continued to wear the putrid outer garment that he had not washed in over three years. Both his hands were shackled by iron chains and locks, so changing clothes proved to be quite difficult. It was only with the help of Ding Dian tearing apart the sleeves of his old clothes did he manage to wear the vest. Now the black vest actually had two parts, front and back, and it had room for arms and buttons, so it was not hard to wear at all.

Ding Dian waited for him to finish putting it on before speaking. "This valuable garment is impenetrable by blades or spears; it was embroidered from dark silkworms on Snowy Mountain. Look, there are two sections to this vest; a blade could not slice this apart. The front section is buckled up together with the back section. This man was an important figure in the Snowy Mountain Sect, else he would not have a 'dark silkworm vest.' He came with the intention of stealing our treasures; little did he realize he would be giving up his own treasure!"

Upon hearing that the black vest was indeed so precious, Di Yun quickly replied: "Big Brother, you have so many enemies, you should really be the one to wear this instead. Besides, every month on the fifteenth..."

Ding Dian shook his head in disagreement and replied: "I have the protection of the Heavenly Glow, I do not need the dark silkworm vest. The torture I suffer every month on the fifteenth is what I willingly concede to. If I wear this precious vest it will go against my intentions. It is only a bit of external pain and will not affect me internally, why make a big deal of it?"

Di Yun felt exceedingly perplexed and continued to question. Ding Dian said: "I told you to attach the beard to pretend to be me and I will protect you from the side. I was only afraid of any accidents, but now that you have the vest I am assured. Now I will recite to you the internal mnemonics of the Heavenly Glow, listen carefully."

Previously, when Ding Dian wanted to teach Di Yun martial arts, the latter insisted on not learning it. But upon understanding the true reason for being framed into captivity, he had a heart that longed for revenge that he could not contain. He only wished he could get out of prison instantly to settle the score with Wan Gui. He saw with his own eyes how easily Ding Dian defeated many impressive martial artists in the martial world with nothing but his bare hands, and thought that if

he could even learn two or three tenths of his skills, then escaping prison for revenge would not be an impossibility. All of a sudden he became terribly upset, his blood started to rush and heat up and his face was flushed red.

Ding Dian knew that Di Yun was stubborn and would not learn his internal arts. He was just about to persuade him to when suddenly Di Yun dropped down on both knees and began to cry loudly on the ground. “Brother Ding, please teach me! I must get revenge! I must get revenge!”

Ding Dian gave a long burst of laughter, the echoes vibrating the walls and roof of the building. “You want revenge, how easy is that?”

After Di Yun’s anger passed, Ding Dian immediately began to transfer him the entry mnemonics and methods for practicing the techniques.

Upon learning these things, Di Yun wasted no time and constantly practiced it. Ding Dian saw that he was practicing really hard and laughed. “Upon completing the Heavenly Glow, you will be unmatched under heaven. Do you really think it is so easy to complete? I had a variety of coincidences, my internal energy foundation was high, and yet it still took me 12 years to complete. Brother Di, it is good to practice hard, but it is more important that you do not overwork yourself and produce counterintuitive results. You must have a sense of calmness, without feelings of distractions. Remember my words clearly.”

Although Di Yun still referred to Ding Dian as “Big Brother”, in his heart he had already treated him as his master, so no matter what he says he would obey. But in his heart were raging emotions of hate surging like waves, how could he find any inner peace?”

For several days the gaoler made a big fuss about nothing, shouting loudly. The guards, constables, and forensics were bothered for half a day, and not until late in the evening did they manage to carry out all 17 corpses out of the prison. Ding Dian and Di Yun only said that those people died from battling against each other, so they did not pursue further.

During the day, Di Yun followed the instructions of Ding Dian and executed the mnemonics of the technique. The Heavenly Glow entry mnemonics were not of great difficulty, but to find calmness and without the slightest bit of delusion was the hard part. Amidst his anger, Di Yun thought of his martial sister, Wan Gui, and his teacher. He practiced until nighttime before his heart felt a little convergence, when all of a sudden, both his front and back were attacked at the same time.

The two attacks were as powerful as two hammers hitting both sides at once. Di Yun drew blank and almost fainted until the pain became slightly numb. He cleared his eyes opened, and saw that in front of him a monk stood on each side. He turned his head and saw behind him another three monks, making five monks in total, encircling him in the middle.

Di Yun thought: “The five enemies Ding Dian spoke of have arrived. I must remain strong and not show any signs of falter.” Then he laughed heartily and said: “Five honourable elders, what do you seek the one called Ding for?”

The monk on the left-hand side replied: “Quickly deliver ‘A Deadly Secret’ over! Huh, you... you... you are...” Suddenly, a loud bang was heard from behind as the monk was hit strongly by a fist. He

began shaking violently and almost fell over. Following that, two more monks were also each hit by a fist and each let out a crying sound and spat out a mouthful of fresh blood.

Di Yun felt very strange and could not resist looking at Ding Dian's direction. He only saw that he attacked with a fist that was soundless and looked invisible. The attack was initiated with superb speed and attacked the chest of the third monk. The third monk let out a loud "ah", moved back a few steps, and hit himself hard against the wall.

The other two monks looked at Di Yun following his sight, went to the huddle of the dark corner of the cell looking at Ding Dian, both shouted in astonishment. "Heavenly Glow, Invisible Divine Fists!" The two monks including the wounded monk had already escaped through the fence over the wall. The other monk carried the other monk on the waist who spat out blood, his hand returning to strike a palm on Ding Dian. Ding Dian countered with a fist of his own. The monk caught his fist and was forced to retreat a step. He caught another fist and retreated yet another step. By the third fist, he was already outside the iron fence.

The monk huffed and choked and ran a few steps and was forced to retreat another step. His entire body was shaking as if he was drunk. He had no choice but to let go of the monk who spat blood on the ground, then ran for his life. But every step he crossed, his legs felt like it was dragging a piece of thousand catty enormous rock. Each of his steps were heavy; by the time he walked six or seven steps, he was so short of breath that his legs were gradually bending and he fell on the floor, no longer able to get up. The two monks on the floor tried to struggle a few times, but could not move.

Ding Dian said: "What a pity, what a pity! Brother Di, if you had not been looking at me, then the monk would not have escaped."

Di Yun saw that the two monks died a painful death, and deep in his heart he felt sympathetic, he secretly said: "Letting the three monks escape is not bad, Brother Ding has killed way too many people."

Ding Dian said: "You think that I am much too ruthless, am I right?"

Di Yun replied: "I... I..." His throat felt plugged and inverted, he could not speak out.

Ding Dian quickly helped him push the blood and massaged for quite some time before the bottleneck in his chest began to relieve itself.

Ding Dian said: "You resent me for being cruel, yet the two vicious monks each hit you with a fist. Had you not been wearing the dark silkworm vest, you would not have survived. Look, this accident was the result of big brother's carelessness; I did not think that they would attack right away. I thought that they would first interrogate you. Ah, yes, they are extremely careful with me. They want to wound me first before interrogating me."

He wiped off the attached beard on Di Yun's cheek and laughed: "Those bald thieves were so scared their hearts almost beat out of their chest. They will not dare to come back again." He continued with a straight face: "Brother Di, the tall monk who got away, his name is Bao Xiang, the fat one's name is Shan Yong. My first strike hit the one who was the strongest, his name is Sheng Di. The five of those monks are from Dark Qinghai Cult's Blood Sabre Clan and are quite formidable opponents. Had I not ambushed them in the dark, one-against-five, I am afraid I may not have been able to take

## Chapter 2 – Prison

them all at once. Shan Yong and Sheng Di have been hit by my divine fists, even if they don't die, they will not live for more than a few days. The remaining Bao Xiang is vicious and cruel in nature, if you ever encounter him in the realm, you must exercise extreme caution." After thinking a long while, he continued: "The master of the five monks I just mentioned is still alive and his martial arts are extremely impressive. In the future we will have to face him."

Even though Di Yun had worn the protective vest, he was hit on both front and back simultaneously, so the damages were not minor. Only with the help of Ding Dian transferring him energy every day for over a dozen days did he manage to recover.

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The next two years passed by quite peacefully. Once in a while one or two foes from the realm would come do battle, but Ding Dian disposed of them easily with either a fist or grab and they would die instantly.

In the past few months Di Yun had continued to vigorously practice the Heavenly Glow, but his progress came to an imminent halt. No matter how hard he practiced, it seemed that he did not make any further progress. Fortunately, even though his shrewdness was not high, he had high determination and realized that such profound internal martial arts could not be learned so easily. With the help of Ding Dian coaching him from the side for many days, he eventually overcame his difficulties.

One afternoon he woke up and continued to practice as he usually would, when suddenly he heard a "huh" sound coming from Ding Dian. There was a hint of anxiety in his voice. After half a day, he heard him utter words to himself: "Today it will not wilt. Changing it tomorrow will not be too late." Di Yun was surprised and turned his body around and saw that Ding Dian lifted his head, staring at the basin of flowers outside the window at the top of the cell.

Since practicing the Heavenly Glow, Di Yun's auditory system became a lot more proficient than what it was before. With one look, he could see three yellow roses in the basket, one of which was lacking a petal. He would often see Ding Dian staring at the basket of flowers and be completely mesmerized during the day; such has been the case for the last few years. He thought that since in prison there was not much activity, the sight of flowers by the window would serve as entertainment for Ding Dian, so he did not think it was very strange. But he saw that the fresh flowers in the basin had not bloomed yet and did not look remarkable. The flowers will bloom in time, but it inevitably had some residue and should be cared for. From the jasmines in the spring wind to the begonias in the autumn moon, day and night, there would always be a basket of flowers placed near the window sill. Di Yun recalled that this specific basket of yellow roses had been placed there for about six or seven days. It was usually the case that it would have been changed, but this time, it remained unchanged.

For the entire day and night, Ding Dian had an irritable and restless state of mind. The following morning, the basket of yellow roses still remained unchanged and at least five or six petals had already been blown away by the wind. Di Yun could sense a bad omen deep within his heart, and saw that Ding Dian's expressions were very negative. He said: "That person forgot to change the flowers this time. Come afternoon, that person will remember for sure."



Ding Dian shouted loudly: "How would such a thing be forgotten? Impossible! Could it be... could it be that this person contrived a sickness? Even if it is indeed sickness, someone should still have been ordered to change the flowers!" He kept walking around the cell and his emotions could not stop surging.

Di Yun did not dare to further pursue the matter. Instead, he sat down cross-legged and continued to practice in peace.

By nightfall, the clouds were ubiquitous and dark, a sign that it was inevitably going to rain soon. After a while, a cold breeze blew through, and the three yellow roses lost a bunch of petals again. In the past several hours, Ding Dian had not kept his eyes off the basket of flowers. With every petal that was blown away, his expression changed for the worst. He felt bitter and miserable, the pain even worse than having the flesh ripped right off his bones.

Di Yun could no longer resist questioning him. "Brother Ding, why are you so restless?"

Ding Dian turned his head over, his face full of anger, and yelled: "Why does it concern you? Why talk so much?" Ever since he taught Di Yun his martial arts, he had never treated him so rudely. Di Yun felt somewhat apologetic, and wanted to say a few words of resolution, but upon seeing that his expression was full of desolate intent and that of a person who suffered some sort of mournful grief, he did not say a word.

That night Ding Dian still did not sit down to rest. Di Yun only watched as he travelled back and forth around the cell. As the shackles around his legs inevitably caused a lot of rattling noises, Di Yun could find no way to sleep peacefully.

The next morning, there was some restless inclined drizzle. In the twilight of dawn he could see the basket of flowers. He saw that the petals of the three yellow roses had all wilted—all that was left in the basket was the stems of the flowers that stood motionless against the wind and rain.

Ding Dian shouted: "Dead? Dead? Are you really dead?" With both hands he grasped hard onto the iron fence, shaking it violently.

Di Yun said: "Big Brother, if you long to see this person so much, why don't we go take a look?"

Ding Dian roared: "Look? Can I look? If I could, I would have gone a long time ago. Do I still have to remain stuck in this stupid cell?" Di Yun did not really understand, his eyes were wide open and he did not make a noise. In the middle of the day, Ding Dian held his head with both hands and sat down without making a noise or move. He did not eat or drink.

His ears heard the sounds of gongs signaling the first watch of the night. In the peace of quiet, time passed quickly. Soon, more gong sounds were heard; it was the second watch.

Ding Dian slowly got up and said: "Brother, we will have a look." He said this in a peaceful tone. Di Yun replied in concurrence. Ding Dian extended both his hands to grab onto the iron fence and lightly moved them in opposite directions. The resulting force caused two rods of the iron fence to bend out of shape immediately. Ding Dian said: "Keep your iron chains in check and don't let it emit any noise." Di Yun complied and grabbed on to his iron chains.

Ding Dian walked near the edge of the wall and began to climb. He whispered: "Jump up!" Di Yun followed and began to scuttle his way up the wall, but in his haste he forgot that his scapula was still pierced by the iron chains, and his entire body was incapable of producing any strength. With one jump, he could not manage to reach a height of more than a meter. Ding Dian extended his hands to grab onto Di Yun and threw him on top of the wall. The two leaped downwards simultaneously.

After passing the wall, there was another extremely high wall in the way. While Ding Dian could probably get over it, Di Yun had no way of exceeding it. Ding Dian groaned, then leaned his back against the wall. He heard some rustling sounds as some silt fell over, and the bricks too fell in small fragments. Di Yun's vision felt obscured, and then he could only see that on the wall there appeared a huge hole and Ding Dian was nowhere to be seen. It turns out that Ding Dian used the remarkable internal energy techniques of the Heavenly Glow to crack through the wall. Di Yun felt both astonished and pleased, as he hurriedly rushed through the hole in the wall.

There was an alley outside. Ding Dian gave a hand gesture, and from the alley they walked to end. Exiting the alley they arrived at the streets. It seemed that Ding Dian knew the streets and alleys quite familiarly. After walking past a street and two alleys, they arrived at the entrance of a family's iron shop.

Ding Dian raised his hands and pushed. With a loud bang, the front gate of the store collapsed instantly. The blacksmith in the store became frightened with shock. He jumped up and yelled: "There is a thief!"

Ding Dian grabbed the blacksmith by the throat and whispered: "Light the candle!"

The blacksmith did not dare to disobey, and so he illuminated a lamp. He saw in front of him two men with long hair drooping down to their shoulders, their faces full of facial hair. They had the appearance of vicious men, how could he dare to move? Ding Dian declared: "Unbound us from our iron chains and shackle!"

The blacksmith figured that the two men were most likely criminals that escaped from prison. He thought that if he were to free them from their confinements, and if the government officials pursue the matter, he would most certainly be punished, so he could not help but hesitate. Ding Dian extended his hand and grabbed onto a thick strip of iron, returned, and hacked on it a few times. With a loud bang, it split into two pieces. He said: "Tell me, is your neck as hard as this?"

The blacksmith felt as if he had just seen the devil. If he wanted to break the iron strip, he should have used a chisel sledgehammer, then he would only have to stir a little while. But upon seeing that this man was strong enough to simply raise his hands and casually break the iron strips, he was certain that the man could easily snap his neck in half, so it was no longer appropriate for him to stay stubborn. He repeatedly said "Yes! Yes!" and produced a steel chisel and iron hammer and helped unbound Ding Dian and Di Yun from their shackles.

The first thing Ding Dian did was remove the iron chain which pierced his scapula. Upon pulling out the iron chain out from Di Yun's scapula, the latter was in so much pain that he nearly fainted. Finally, Di Yun held in both hands a bloody iron chain and stood in front of the anvil. He thought of the restrictions of the iron chain that he now held in his hands: he was stuck in a dark world without justice for a hardship of over five years. Until today, the iron chain had confined his body.

## A Deadly Secret

He could not help but feel emotions of delight and sadness at once, and in a daze, tears soon dripped from his eyes.

## Chapter 3 – Pale as Chrysanthemum



*"That was how six months passed. Regardless of wind or rain, frost or snow, I would go every morning to admire the flowers. Lady Ling reciprocated and changed the flowers regardless of the weather. Every day she would only give me only one glance and never a second. And every time she looked at me, her face would blush bright red."*

Di Yun followed Ding Dian out of the shop. Once Di Yun's shackles were removed, his entire body felt much lighter and walking became a breeze; he was not used to this. Several times, his head felt heavy and his legs felt light, and he nearly toppled over. But he saw that Ding Dian's movements were unflustered. In fact, he was even walking faster and faster, so he could not help but rush himself to keep up, in fear that they may be separated in darkness.

In a short period of time, the two of them arrived at the location where the basket of flowers was placed near the window sill. Ding Dian lifted his head up and hesitated for a long while. It seemed that he wanted to enter, yet he was unwilling. Di Yun saw that the window was shut tightly, and in the building there was no noise, he suggested: "I will go in first, alright?" Ding Dian nodded his head in agreement.

Di Yun reached the front entrance of the small building and extended his hands to push open the door, then realized that the interior of the door was bolted shut. Thankfully, the enclosure was somewhat low, so with a willow tree branch he brought it through the wall, and with a small leap, he grabbed onto the branch, and turned over his body and entered the enclosure. Inside, there was a small door that was actually unlatched. Di Yun pushed open the door and proceeded to the second floor. In the darkness he could hear nothing but the creaking sounds emitted from his flight up the stairs. His feet felt as if they were floating, giving him an eerie feeling of discomfort. In the past five years, he was used to walking only around his prison cell.

Soon, Di Yun reached the top of the stairs. He remained silent and listened carefully, but there were no sounds to be heard. In dim lightning, he saw a door on the left, so he decided to check it out. Inside the room, it was so quiet he could not even hear any breathing sounds. He faintly saw a candle standing on the table. He extended his hands to the table and could feel a knife and flint, so he ignited a fire and illuminated the candle. Under the bright light, he suddenly an indescribable sense of loneliness and misery.

The room was completely empty. With the exception of a table, a chair, and a bed, there was nothing else. On the bed hung a grass-green white curtain, a thin quilt, and a cloth pillow. Below the bed was a green pair of female shoes. There was only one pair of shoes, so whoever lived here was likely a female.

He felt expressionless for a moment, then he headed to the second room. This one did not even have a table or chair. It was just like the other room, either the furniture was recently moved, or throughout all these years it had remained empty the whole time. He went downstairs and searched each and every room in the house, but not a single person was to be found.

He felt something was wrong, and reported his findings to Ding Dian. The latter said: "You found nothing?" Di Yun nodded his head. It seemed that Ding Dian had already anticipated this ahead of time, so he did not feel the least bit surprised. Instead, he suggested that they search someplace else.

That someplace else was actually a mansion. The door was lacquered vermillion, and on top of the door hung two big lanterns pinned by a large copper nail. On one was inscribed the words "Jingzhou Prefectural Hall", and on the other, the words "Ling Mansion." Di Yun was taken aback. "This is the prefectural hall of Jingzhou's magistrate. Brother Ding, what did you come here for? Do you wish to kill him?"

### Chapter 3 – Pale as Crysanthemum

Ding Dian grasped him by the hand, and without saying a word, he jumped over the wall. He was somewhat familiar with the surroundings of the prefecture, he passed through the porch and over a building directly, as if he was walking around his own residence. After passing through two corridors, he arrived outside the door of the reception room. Brightness from inside the room penetrated the paper of the window. Ding Dian suddenly trembled violently and said: "Brother Di, go have a look inside."

Di Yun pushed open the reception door and was welcomed by a dazzling candle light. On the table, two white candles were illuminated. It was actually a funeral hall. All this time he was worried that he would see a funeral hall, coffin, or dead body, and now it was right in front of him. He had already anticipated this, but still he could not resist trembling. When he focused his attention on the soul board, he saw that it was inscribed the eight words "resting place of beloved daughter Ling Shuanghua". Suddenly, he felt a huge gust of wind blowing from behind as Ding Dian rushed in.

Ding Dian stood expressionless for a moment, then he threw himself on the table and let out a loud cry of grief. "Shuanghua, you really did go before me."

In a split second, many thoughts erupted in Di Yun's mind. As Ding Dian cried on the table, it served to explain all of his bizarre actions in the prison cell; Di Yun now understood the situation completely. But upon further contemplation, there were still many things that were difficult to explain.

Ding Dian disregarded the fact that he was a serious felon who broke out of prison; he did not care that he was currently at the residence of the magistrate, he only cried his heart out in sadness. Di Yun knew that there was nothing he could do to better the situation, so he only let things take its course.

After crying for a while, Ding Dian slowly stood up straight and extended his hands to uncover the curtains. Behind the curtains was actually a coffin. With both hands he hugged the coffin tightly, his face fit snugly on the lid. He sobbed and sniffled: "Shuanghua, Shuanghua, why do you have to be so cruel? Before you went, why didn't you tell me to see you one last time?"

Suddenly, Di Yun heard the sounds of light approaching footsteps. He could sense that people were approaching rapidly from outside, and quickly said: "Big Brother, someone is coming."

Ding Dian kissed the coffin passionately and paid no attention.

Soon, they were interrupted by a bright fire; two men entered the room holding a lit torch. One said: "Who is making such a ruckus?" The two were middle-aged men about 45 or 46, dressed in luxurious clothes, and with an essence of valiance on their faces. He gave a glance at Ding Dian and asked: "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

Di Yun's heart became filled with rage, and he countered: "And who are you? What are you doing here?"

The man holding the torch reprimanded: "Little thief, this man is the magistrate of Jingzhou. You have some nerve to come here in the middle of the night, are you trying to start a rebellion? Kneel before him!" Di Yun laughed grimly and did not make a move.

Ding Dian wiped his tears and asked: "When did Shuanghua pass away? What disease did she contract?" His voice was completely at peace.

Magistrate Ling glanced at the speaker and replied: "Oh, I know who it is, it is Hero Ding. My daughter has unfortunately passed away. Thank you for your condolences and expressions of sympathy. My daughter has already passed away for five days; the physicians could not identify the cause of death and could only say it was an accumulation of sadness and difficulties."

"So now your desires have been fulfilled," remarked Ding Dian angrily.

Magistrate Ling sighed. "Hero Ding, you are indeed very stubborn. If you had spoken out much earlier, my daughter would not have died. In fact, you would be my son-in-law, wouldn't that be great?"

Ding Dian said loudly, "You claim that I caused Shuanghua's death? You're telling me it wasn't you who caused her death?" As he said this, he moved forward one step towards the magistrate, his eyes full of cruel and vicious intent.

Magistrate Ling remained unflustered and shook his head in discord. "It has already happened, why speak of it further? Shuanghua, Shuanghua, under the nine springs<sup>1</sup>, you probably fault your father for not forgiving you." He slowly approached the soul board. He leaned against the table with his left hand and wiped his tears with his right.

Ding Dian replied densely, "Suppose that I kill you today, then in heaven, Shuanghua will most certainly not forgive me. Ling Tuisi, out of respect for your daughter, the torture you gave me for the past seven years, today, I will write it off with one stroke. Henceforth, if you harass me any further, don't fault the one with the surname Ding for being heartless. Brother Di, let's go."

Magistrate Ling sighed: "Hero Ding, today we have come to such a conclusion. Tell me, what good does it bring?"

Ding Dian replied: "In the clearness of the night, console your heart and ask yourself if you feel a little ashamed. You long for nothing but 'A Deadly Secret', and you are even willing to sacrifice your beloved daughter.

Magistrate Ling said: "Hero Ding, don't be in a hurry to leave. You are better off reciting the secrets of the sword manual, and I will grant you the antidote, else you may perish."

Ding Dian was shocked. "What antidote?" At this time, he suddenly felt that his cheeks, lips, and palms became numb, and at the same time, he could smell a dull fragrance of flowers. Such fragrance of flowers, such fragrance of flowers... he felt alarmed and furious, his body began to shake violently.

Magistrate Ling said: "I was afraid there would be an unworthy fellow that would disturb my daughter, so..."

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese mythology; analogous to hell.

Ding Dian came to a realization and shouted in anger, “You smeared poison on the coffin? Ling Tuisi, you are very malicious!” He got up and tried to attack with a fist, but he did not expect that the poison was indeed so powerful, that at that moment his entire body felt weak and his bones felt crushed, he could not unleash the power of the Heavenly Glow.

Magistrate Ling Tuisi dodged the attack, his movements somewhat nimble. From this time, four men entered wielding swords and sabres, all aiming for Ding Dian at once. Ding Dian raised his left leg and kicked the wrist of the man on the left. Usually this kick would be extremely remarkable, and the sabre on the person’s hand should be kicked out, but during the kick, he felt that his entire body was weak and could not release any strength, he suddenly became stagnant. It turns out that the toxicity had reached his legs. The man turned over the back of his sabre and with a bang hit Ding Dian hard on his upper leg. Ding Dian’s bone felt shattered as he fell on the ground.

Di Yun was alarmed. He was frightened and did not have any time for contemplation. He decided to jump at Ling Tuisi, thinking that he could possibly hold him as a hostage in order to save Ding Dian. But he did not expect that Ling Tuisi unleashed an attack with his left palm, and with a loud cry hit him hard on the chest. The technique and strength of this palm was quite impressive. Di Yun had long pushed aside any considerations for the value of his own life, and without hesitation he continued his assault. It was quite obvious that the palm of Ling Tuisi had directly stroke Di Yun in the chest, yet the latter disregarded it. Ling Tuisi did not realize that his opponent actually wore a valuable dark silkworm vest underneath that protected his body. Even though Ling Tuisi’s martial arts were formidable, he became flustered. With his left hand, Di Yun stroke the “Shanzhong Acupoint” on his opponent’s chest.

Following this stroke of success, Di Yun approached Ding Dian immediately and carried the latter on his back, while with his left hand he continued to hold Ling Tuisi by his acupoint. The four armed men were in a scruple, uttered profanities, but did not dare to act rashly. Ding Dian demanded: “Throw the torch away and blow out the candle.” The man holding the torch did not dare to object, and in an instant the funeral hall turned pitch black.

With his left hand, Di Yun grabbed Ling Tuisi by the chest, and with his right hand he helped support Ding Dian, and they quickly backed away. Ding Dian gave directions, and not before long they arrived beside the door of the garden. Di Yun kicked open the door, and emanated a forceful punch on Ling Tuisi’s “Shanzhong Acupoint”, then he grabbed Ding Dian and ran away. In the darkness they urgently rushed out of the scene.

Di Yun had already studied the Heavenly Glow Sutra for two years. Even though it may not be said that he had any significant accomplishment, his internal energy was not superficial. When he punched Ling Tuisi in such anger and haste, he actually released quite a lot of force. It happened to hit his opponent exactly on a crucial acupoint on his chest. After Ling Tuisi was hit, he uttered a melancholic groan and fainted. His bodyguards were startled and could only think about rescuing their master, and abandoned the thought of chasing the two assailants.

Ding Dian felt his arms and legs become more and more numb, yet he was still fully conscious. He was quite familiar with the surroundings of Jiangliang county in Jingzhou, so he gave directions to Di Yun, turning left and turning right. Not before long they distanced themselves from the noisiness of the city, and soon arrived at an abandoned garden. Ding Dian said: “The Ling Prefecture will most certainly give an order to block the city gate so as to increase vigilance and interrogation. My poison



has become quite cumbersome so I can't leave the city. This abandoned garden has often been said to contain ghosts, so no one will dare to come. We will take refuge here first and discuss later."

Di Yun helped escort him under a plum tree and said: "Brother Ding, what poison have you contracted? Is it curable?"

Ding Dian sighed a few times and laughed bitterly. "It's no good. I contracted the acute poison of the 'Golden Ripple Flower', and under heaven there is no antidote that can cure me. However long I can endure, I will endure."

Di Yun was taken aback, his entire body degenerated into a cold system. He trembled: "What? Are... are you joking?" Deep in his heart he knew that Ding Dian was not joking.

Ding Dian said: "The toxicity of the 'Golden Ripple Flower' of Ling Tuisi is extremely lethal. Hehe, in the past I only sniffed it a few times, and I passed out instantly. This time it has entered my flesh, how do I have any chance?"

Di Yun replied: "Brother Ding, don't... don't be sad. Stay strong... alas... when it comes to relationships, I... I am the same, there is no method to that... you should think of a way to cure your poison first... I will fetch some water for you to cleanse." In his heart he spoke in haste, so what he regurgitated was rather nonsensical.

Ding Dian shook his head. "It's no use. Should the poison of the 'Golden Ripple Flower' be washed, my flesh will instantly swell and necrose, I will die an even more painful death. Brother Di, I have many things I want to say to you, don't be rushed and muddled. If you become disorderly, I may leave out by mistake any important things I need to say. There's not much time left, I must speak, allow me to sit here in peace, and don't interrupt my speech."

Di Yun could only sit by his side, but in his heart how could he find any peace or quiet?

Ding Dian spoke smoothly, as if he was speaking as a third person, a person who was completely irrelevant to him.

"I am a citizen of Jingmen. I come from a family of martial artists. My father could be considered a reputable fellow in Lianghu<sup>2</sup>. My potential for martial arts was also decent. Besides learning from family traditions, I also had two teachers. Afterwards, my parents passed away, and I was left with a decent fortune. I did not want to speak of marriage and only focused on my martial arts, and made some friends in the realm.

"That was 15 years ago. I traveled by ship to Sichuan province, passed the three gorges<sup>3</sup> of Yangtze, and the ship anchored at the town of San Dou Ping. That night, I heard fighting sounds on the ship. My whole life I was a martial arts fanatic, so naturally I was curious. I observed the battle through a window. That night the moonlight was bright, and I could see very clearly three people besieging an elder. The three men were considered well-known figures in the martial arts world of Lianghu, so I

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<sup>2</sup> Literally translates to "Two Lakes", which refers to both Hubei and Hunan.

<sup>3</sup> The three gorges on the Yangtze refer to the Qutang Gorge, Wuxia Gorge, and Xiling Gorge.

could recognize them. One was 'Five Cloud Hand' Wan Zhenshan. (Di Yun interrupted: "Ah, that is my martial uncle!") The other was 'Divine Land Dragon' Yan Daping. (Di Yun said: "Yes, this is my second martial uncle, although I have never seen him before.") The third one wielded a long sword, his skills were vigorous and nimble, it was 'Iron Lock Across the River' Qi Zhangfa. (Di Yun was startled and called out: "It's my teacher!")

"Wan Zhenshan and I once had the fate of several encounters, so I knew that his martial arts were not to be taken lightly. I was vastly inferior to him at the time. I saw the three of them martial brothers join forces to attack the enemy, it may be assumed that they certainly had good odds of success. The elder had already sustained an injury on his back, and was shedding blood repeatedly. Furthermore, he was unarmed and only fought against the three of them with his bare hands, but his martial arts were much superior to Wan Zhenshan and the others, so the three of them did not dare to draw near. The more I observed the more indignant I felt. I saw that every move unleashed by Wan Zhenshan and the others were filled with murderous intent, it was evident that they wanted to kill the elder. I did not dare to speak out, fearing that they would notice me, then disaster would impede upon me. In the realm, when animosity and murder were seen by onlookers, it was often the case that they too would be killed.

"After fighting for half a day, the back of the elder shed more and more blood, he actually could not continue battle any further, and suddenly declared: 'Very well, I will hand it over to you!' He extended his hands to fish out an object from his bosom. Wan Zhenshan and the others all rushed forward at once, seemingly afraid that any other person would vie for the object first. All of a sudden, the elder pushed both palms forward. The three martial brothers were extorted by the elder's palm energy, and they all retreated at once. The elder turned around and rushed, and with a splash he jumped into the lake. The three men shouted in alarm and hurried to the river bank.

"The Yangtze River pours down from the three gorges, how rapid is the current of the river in San Dou Ping? In merely a flash, the elder was nowhere to be seen. But your teacher refused to reconcile. He jumped on my boat, seized the bamboo paddle, and in a burst scattered around the river. The three men caused the death of the elder, they should have been delighted, but all three of them appeared dreadful. I did not dare to look too much, and covered my head in the quilt. I could hear the faint sounds of their bickering; they seemed to be blaming each other.

"I listened as they walked very far away before I dared come out of hiding, when suddenly above the trees a loud cracking sound was heard. The helmsman yelled: 'Ah! There are water ghosts!' I turned my head to look, and all I could see was a person drenched in water lying on the floor of the plank, it was in fact the elder. It turns out that after he jumped into the river, he swam beneath the ship, then he used a strong eagle claw attack to hook onto the bottom of the ship, focused on his breathing, and waited until his enemies left before he resurfaced. I quickly helped him inside the ship. I saw that his breathing was faint and he could not speak.

"I thought that if Wan Zhenshan and the others did not drop the matter, they would most certainly go underwater to look for the corpse of the elder. But I had a sense of justice and wanted to save his life, so I ordered the boatman to steer upstream against the three gorges. Naturally, the boatman was unwilling, and in the middle of the night another labourer was nowhere to be seen, else how hard could it be to travel up the three gorges? But nevertheless, money will make the devil turn millstones.

## A Deadly Secret

"I happened to carry some pain relief medicine, so I helped the elder treat his injury. But the wound on his back was caused by a very deep stab of the sword, it even pierced his lungs, hence the injury could not be recovered. I could only try my best and did not ask him anything. I saw with my very own eyes how he leaped into the river and dove beneath the ship. Such courage and martial arts was worthy of me risking my life for him.

"After three days of treatment, the elder asked for my surname, gave a bitter laugh and said: 'Very good, very good!' and from his bosom produced a paper bag and handed it to me. I said: 'Where are the relatives of elder? I will certainly bring you to them without neglect.' he elder replied: 'Do you know who I am?' I replied: 'I don't know.' He said: 'I am Mei Niansheng.'

"Naturally, my state of shock was no small matter, why? Don't you feel odd? Do you know who Mei Niansheng is? He is 'Iron Bone Ink Calyx' Mei Niansheng. Do you really not know? (Di Yun shook his head and said: 'I have never heard of this name.') Hehe, right, naturally your teacher would not speak of such matters with you. 'Iron Bone Ink Calyx' Mei Niansheng was a renowned pugilist in the martial arts world of Hunan. He had three disciples: the eldest disciple was named Wan Zhenshan, the second was named Yan Daping, the third was named... (Di Yun interrupted in shock: "Ding... Brother Ding... what... what did you say?") The third disciple was named Qi Zhangfa. When I heard him declare that he was Mei Niansheng, that amount of shock, was no less than how shocked you are at this instant. With my very own eyes I saw the intense battle during the night of the bright moon, I saw the vicious antics of Wan Zhenshan and his martial brothers, I felt even more horrified than you.

"Elder Mei gave a bitter laugh, shook his head and said: 'My three disciples are most vicious, they stabbed me while I was caught off guard, your elder I had no choice but to jump into the river to flee.' (Di Yun trembled: "What? Did my teacher really strike first?") I didn't know what to say to comfort him. In my mind I thought that there must be a very strong reason why the four of them became enemies. But I am an outsider; even though I was curious, it was not my place to ask. Elder Mei continued: 'My only relatives in this world are my three disciples. They wanted to take one of my swordplay manuals, but they do not have the mnemonics to go with it, what good is it then? Even though Liancheng Swordplay is miraculous, how can it compare to the Heavenly Glow? This Heavenly Glow Sutra, I will give it to you, may you practice it well. If this sutra were to be mastered, the power is unthinkable. Do not pass it to any evildoer.' And that is how I got my Heavenly Glow Sutra.

"After Elder Mei spoke these words, he passed away no longer than four hours later. Amidst the three gorges I buried his body in the river. At that time I did not realize that 'A Deadly Secret' was of such great significance. I only knew that it was a greatly sought for sword manual in his clan, hence I did not consider to keep anything hidden. In front of Elder Mei's tomb I established a stone tablet and marked the words 'The tomb of the Hero of Lianghu, Elder Mei.' Who would have thought that that stone tablet would cause me so much trouble in the future. Someone had tracked down through the clues of the stone tablet the whereabouts of the stone craftsman and the boatman. Eventually, they figured that since I was the one who established the tablet and buried Elder Mei, I was the most likely person to have all of Elder Mei's valuables that he carried.

"After no more than three months, a grand visitor from the realm arrived at my residence. That person had considerable manners, but he mumbled and was not to the point. Eventually, he revealed his true intentions; he said that there was a large map of a treasure deposit that Elder Mei kept with him, and declared that I was the one who took it. He asked me to take it out so we could

both analyze it in detail. If we successfully find the treasures, I would get seven-tenths of it, while he would get three-tenths.

“Elder Mei only gave me a precious internal energy sutra. He also recited several sword mnemonics, he called it something like ‘A Deadly Secret’, but it was only several numbers with no other meaning, from where could there be a treasure map? I told him everything truthfully, but the man refused to believe me, and insisted that I hand over the martial arts manual. Elder Mei warned me repeatedly not to transfer it to any evildoers, so naturally I did not tell him anything. The man left in haste. Three days later, he ventured into my residence in the middle of the night and fought with me. I wounded him in the shoulder and he retreated in defeat.

“Soon the word spread, and more and more people came to me. I could not handle so many of them. Eventually, even Wan Zhenshan came. I remained at my home in Jingmen and did not dare to go out. Eventually, I had no choice but to conceal my identity and ran as far away as I could. I reached a ranch outside the pass and began working a business trading beasts. And with that five or six years passed, I could no longer hear any news. In my heart I deeply wished to return to my family, so I changed my attire and returned to my home in Jingmen. Who would have guessed that the house had long been burned to the earth, luckily I did not have any close relatives, so this actually turned out to be a complete stop.”

Di Yun’s mind was perplexed, he wanted to not believe it, but Brother Ding had never told a lie to him before. Furthermore, he was as close friends with him as blood brothers, what need is there to fabricate a lie to deceive himself? Was it possible that the honest and sincere teacher that he respected so greatly, was in fact a sinister and malicious fellow?

He saw Ding Dian’s face began to tremble violently, it seemed that the toxicity was spreading. Di Yun said: “Brother Ding, my relationship with my teacher and grand-teacher, there is no hurry to investigate. You... should think carefully, what can liberate you from your poison?”

Ding Dian shook his head and replied: “I told you not to interrupt, now listen closely.

“Those events took place over nine years ago. On the first third of the ninth month, I reached Hankou and sold an old ginseng that I had brought from outside the pass to the drug store. The owner of the drug store was an elegant man, after we completed our business, he invited me to observe the famous Chrysanthemum Association in Hankou. This Chrysanthemum Association had an impressive breed of flowers indeed. The yellow chrysanthemums included golden Chinese peonies, yellow crane plums, yellow imperial gowns, golden peacocks, golden lamps, and yellow warbler feathers. The white chrysanthemums included jade peonies, jade carvings, jade fine jewellerys, snow regiments, Diao Chan’s respects to the moon, and liquid lotuses. The purple chrysanthemums included double flying swallows, red silks, purple jade lotuses, amethyst cups, and cornelian plates. The red chrysanthemums included red beauties, red oceans, drunk consorts, rouge fragrances, lychee brocades, red apex cranes, diluted red Buddhist humbles, red powder regiments, peach blossom chrysanthemums, Xi Shi powders, beautiful red peaches, jade springs...”

Ding Dian casually cited every type of chrysanthemum variety with ease. It seemed that he understood flowers even more profoundly than he did martial arts. Di Yun felt surprised and strange, but then he recalled that Ding Dian was a flower lover, thus the fresh flowers of Lady Mei outside the window sill of the prison never stopped changing. So knowing such a huge variety of chrysanthemum flowers was not anything out of the ordinary.

As Ding Dian talked about the names of flowers, from the corner of his mouth, one could make out faint smiles. His expression was gentle, and he spoke softly: "On one side I observed, on the other side I praised, and recited the various names of the chrysanthemums present. After I thoroughly observed all the flowers and left the garden, I said: 'This chrysanthemum association is truly remarkable, unfortunately there are no green chrysanthemums.'

"Suddenly from behind me I heard the voice of a young girl. 'My Lady, this man too realizes the existence of green chrysanthemums. The 'Spring Water Jade Ripples' and 'Jasper Wishes', how could normal people have access to these prestigious flowers?'

"I turned my head and saw a young girl of otherworldly delicacy. She wore a tender yellow garment; it was truly a case of being as pale as chrysanthemum. In my whole life, I have never seen such an elegant and exquisite lady. Following her was a servant girl around 14 or 15 years old. When the lady saw me stare at her with such attraction, her face instantly blushed red, and spoke in a low voice: "Sorry Mister, please don't fault us, my servant girl only spoke out casually.' At that moment I was too mesmerized to muster up any reply.

"I watched as she slowly left the garden, but I could not bring myself to speak up. The owner of the drug store said: 'That is the lady of the Ling academics from Wuchang<sup>4</sup>, she is indeed a famous beauty of Wuhan. The flowers and plants in her residence are truly remarkable.'

"After I left the garden and departed with the owner of the drug store, I returned to the inn. Besides being clouded by thoughts of Lady Ling, nothing else could enter my mind at that moment. By afternoon, I crossed the river to Wuchang, asked for directions, and made my way to the Ling Prefecture. But supposing that I simply go in to pay a visit, that would seem much too brash. I began to stroll back and forth outside the front door. My mind was a complete mess. I felt happy yet nervous, and I began to scold myself. At that time I was not considered a young man, yet I was no different than a little child falling in love for the first time, I turned into a clueless housefly."

As he said this, his face turned to a light complexion, his eyes turned bright and he seemed to be excited.

Di Yun felt afraid, he was worried that Ding Dian would not be able to endure, and said: "Brother Ding, you should have a good rest for now. I will seek a physician to diagnose you, it may not be certain that this poison is incurable." As he said this he stood up.

Ding Dian grabbed him by the sleeve and said: "If we go out searching for a physician looking like this, isn't that just seeking our own death?" He paused for a moment and continued to speak. "Brother Di, that day when you heard that your martial sister was getting married, you were so sad that you decided to hang yourself. Your martial sister shows no love or respect for you, it is not worth dying for her."

Di Yun nodded. "You are right. Over the years, I have come to realize this."

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<sup>4</sup> Wuchang is a district of Wuhan, and Wuhan is the capital of Hubei.

Ding Dian said: “Suppose that your martial sister loves you deeply, and ended up dying for you, then, you too should die for her.”

Di Yun suddenly came to a realization and asked: “Did Lady Ling die for you?”

Ding Dian replied: “Correct, she died for me, and at this moment I wish to die for her. I... I feel happy inside. She loves me tenderly, I... I also treated her well. Brother Di, not to mention the fact that my poison is incurable, even if it was curable, I do not wish to be treated.”

All of a sudden, Di Yun felt a feeling of bitter sadness that was hard to describe. At that point he felt pain knowing that his companion would soon pass away, but deep in his heart he actually admired his happiness, because somewhere in this world once existed a woman who loved him sincerely and was willing to die for him, and he was willing to reciprocate this action. But what about himself? What about himself?

Ding Dian once again immersed himself in his memories and continued: “The front door of the Ling Prefecture was coloured vermillion, and in front stood two majestic stone lions. I am a man from the realm, how could I just venture inside? I stood guard outside for over six hours until nightfall. I didn’t even know what I was hoping for.

“The sky was getting dark, yet I did not think about leaving. All of a sudden, from the small side door out came a young lady. She slowly approached me and spoke softly: ‘Fool, you are still here? My Lady requests that you leave.’ I looked closely and recalled that this was the servant girl of Lady Ling. My heart was bouncing all over my chest, and stammered a reply: ‘What... what did you say?’

“She laughed and replied: ‘My Lady and I made a bet on when you would leave. I already won two silver rings, won’t you leave?’ I was startled and delighted and replied: ‘Your Lady already knew that I was here?’ The servant girl laughed again, ‘I have already come out several times, but you never saw me once. Your soul wasn’t even in your body, am I right?’ She laughed again, turned around and began to walk away. I quickly said: ‘Sister!’ She said: ‘What? What do you want?’ I replied: ‘From what I heard, inside the prefecture there are several basins of rare green chrysanthemum. I want to take a look, would that be alright?’ She nodded her head, and pointed her finger at a red building near the garden behind the prefecture, and said: ‘I will ask my Lady, if she agrees, then she will place the green chrysanthemums on top of the window sill of the red building.’

“That night, I sat on the slate outside Ling Prefecture. On the morning of the second day, Brother Di, I was blessed with good fortune, for two basins of pale green chrysanthemums really did appear on top of the window sill. I knew that one pot was called ‘Spring Water Jade Ripple’, while the other was called ‘Jasper Wishes’, but the only thing on my mind at the time was the person who put the flowers there. At that moment, I could see the most beautiful face stealthily half-exposed behind the curtains. She gave me a glance, then all of a sudden her face flushed red and she hid herself behind the curtains and did not reappear.

“Brother Di, your brother I am grotesque in appearance. I am neither rich nor noble. I am nothing more than an uncultivated man from the realm, how could I dare to hope for any beautiful woman to appreciate me? From that day onward, every morning I would go to the garden of the Ling Prefecture and stare at the Lady’s window for half a day. Lady Ling seemed to remember me, because every day she would change a new basin of flowers and put it on the window sill.

“That was how six months passed. Regardless of wind or rain, frost or snow, I would go every morning to admire the flowers. Lady Ling reciprocated and changed the flowers regardless of the weather. Every day she would only give me only one glance and never a second. And every time she looked at me, her face would blush bright red. As long as I could see her fluid glance and her rosy red cheeks, I was perfectly satisfied. She never spoke to me, nor did I dare to speak out. The truth was with my martial arts abilities I could have easily leaped to the window and approached her directly, but I did not once dare to have any irreverent ideas. Even more, I did not dare to write a letter to her to express my sincerity.

“On the night of the fifth of the third month of that year, two monks visited my residence and suddenly attacked me. They received relevant information and wanted to steal the Heavenly Glow and sword manual. They were two of five monks from the ‘Blood Sabre Sect’, one of which I took care of in prison, which you saw with your very own eyes. However, at that point in time I had not mastered the Heavenly Glow, hence my martial arts were not comparable to theirs. As a result I was wounded greatly by the two fearsome monks and nearly lost my life. I hid in a barn fodder and managed to get away.

“That wound was indeed not minor, for it took me a full three months to even generate enough strength to get up. I got out of bed with the support of crutches, and made my way to the garden of the Ling Prefecture, but I all the scenery was gone. I inquired and found out that the Lings had moved three months ago. To where they settled, I did not know.

“Brother Ding, think about it: my disappointment back then was much greater than the injuries I sustained right now. I felt something strange, for I knew that Magistrate Ling was a renowned figure in Wuchang—if he really moved, there was no way that nobody would know where. I inquired and investigated thoroughly from the east to the west, spent a lot of money and energy, yet I still did not have the slightest clue. There was definitely something fishy about it. Clearly, Magistrate Ling was hiding from his enemies, perhaps there was a special reason that they would so suddenly migrate without a trace. The coincidence was that they moved at the same time as I sustained injuries.

“From that point onward no matter what I did I could not set my mind on it, and I wandered around the depths of the realm. Thankfully, I was blessed with good fortune, for one day in a teahouse at Changsha, I overheard a discussion between two clan members. They were talking about heading over to Jingzhou to seek Wan Zhenshan to ask him to hand over the ‘Liancheng Swordplay.’ I thought that on that day, Wan Zhenshan and his martial brothers murdered their teacher for this very sword manual. In regards to what the manual looked like, there was no harm in looking, hence I followed the two men to Jiangling<sup>5</sup>. Those two clan members really overestimated their capabilities; they headed to the Wan residence and were all captured and sent to the government office in Jingzhou. I decided to follow the crowd. I saw in front of the office was taped a big notice, it was truly a joy from heaven. It turns out that the magistrate was not a stranger, but in fact Lady Ling’s father, Ling Tuisi.

“That night, I secretly held on my hands a basin of roses. I placed it on the window sill of Lady Ling’s residence and waited patiently below. The following morning, the lady opened her window and saw the basin of flowers. She cried out in alarm. Then she saw me standing outside. We hadn’t seen each

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<sup>5</sup> A county in Jingzhou.

other in well over a year, and thought that we would not be fortunate enough to see each other ever again. To meet again after such a long period of separation, the joy I felt was truly indescribable. She looked towards my direction for a moment and her face blushed red, then she swiftly shut the window. On the third day, she finally spoke out and asked: ‘Have you fallen ill? You grew a lot thinner.’

“From that point onward, I no longer felt human, I felt like a celestial being from heaven. In fact, even a celestial being would surely not be as happy as I. Every day in the middle of the night, I would head upstairs and invite Lady Ling outside, and together we travelled around the landmarks of Jiangling. Never once did we do anything inappropriate, but there was nothing that we did not talk about. We were closer than the most intimate of friends under heaven.

“One night, Lady Ling revealed a great secret to me. Even though her father was a successful candidate in the imperial civil service examination and was a magistrate, he was actually the leader of the Raspy Dragon Sect in Lianghu. Not only was he outstanding in literature, he was also an impressive martial artist. I respected Lady Ling like a deity, so naturally I also respected her father, hence I did not think much of it.

“On another night, Lady Ling told me that there was an intricate reason why her father did not remain as an imperial secretary, and rather spent many thousands of taels of silver to request to be a prefectural magistrate in Jingzhou. It turns out that from the history books he figured out that in the grounds of Jingzhou was buried an immense treasure.

“Lady Ling said that during the time of the Six Dynasties, Emperor Wu of Liang died in a rebellion. Emperor Jiangwen of Liang took the throne but too fell in the hands of the rebel Hou Jing<sup>6</sup>. His successor, King Xiaoyi of Xiangdong, relocated to Jiangling and became Emperor Yuan of Liang. Emperor Yuan was weak and incompetent, and took a liking in gathering precious valuables. In the three years that he was emperor in Jiangling, the treasures he extorted were countless. On the third year of the Chensheng era<sup>7</sup>, Wei soldiers broke through Jiangling and killed Emperor Yuan, but no one knew the location of the treasures he extorted over the years. The Wei marshal Yu Jin flogged and murdered thousands of people trying to find the whereabouts of the treasure, but it was all in vain. He was afraid that the ones who knew the whereabouts of the treasure would excavate it in the future, so he murdered several tens of thousands of citizens from Jiangling all the way to Chang’an. Most were murdered or victimized, and there were practically no survivors. Over the course of several hundred years, the secret was never discovered. As time passed, there was even less of a chance that anyone would know.

“Lady Ling said that her father spent many years and investigated the government in Jingzhou as well as many different kinds of ancient books and records. He confirmed that Emperor Yuan’s treasures were buried on the ground outside the city of Jiangling. Emperor Yuan was violent and ruthless, presumably after burying the treasures, he killed anyone who knew of the secret, hence

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<sup>6</sup> Hou Jing was a general of the Liang Dynasty. He controlled the Liang imperial regime for several years and usurped the Liang throne, establishing a state of Han. He was defeated by Xiaoyi. He is one of the most reviled figures in Chinese history, known for his exceeding cruelty to enemies and civilians.

<sup>7</sup> The era of Emperor Yuan’s reign, 552-554 A.D.



the Wei marshal could not figure out its location no matter how many innocent citizens he tortured or interrogated.”

Di Yun heard up to this point, and he began to put the pieces of the puzzle together. He said: “Brother Ding, you know the secret of the treasure deposit, am I right? So many people came to prison to seek you, presumably they must have come for the treasure deposit.”

Ding Dian gave a bitter smile and continued to speak:

“Upon hearing Lady Ling speak these words to me, I could not help but feel that her father had a heart full of greed—he was already all-rounded in literature and martial arts, and he was rich and noble. Why still seek the treasure deposit? Later I discussed with her the various peculiarities of the realm. I did not conceal from her the incident by the river where Wan Zhenshan and his martial brothers were trying to kill their teacher. I also told her about the Heavenly Glow and A Deadly Secret and so forth.

“We experienced over half a year of happy days. One day, on the fourteenth of the seventh month, Lady Ling said: ‘Ding’ge, I have told father about our relationship. We will let him decide, then we won’t have to be sneaky like this anymore...’ Before she could finish her sentence, she leaned her head against my chest. I replied: ‘You are a precious lady from a great family, I’m afraid that your father will look down on me.’ She replied: ‘My ancestors were also people from the martial world, only that my father opted to become an official, and I don’t know the slightest bit of martial arts. My father loves me more than anything. Ever since my mother passed away, no matter what I ask for, he will always permit it.’

“Once I heard her say this, I was naturally overjoyed. The next day, I was so ecstatic I could not sleep. I waited until midnight to visit Lady Ling in her residence. Her face blushed red and she said to me: ‘Father said, he will leave the decision all up to me.’ I was so happy I felt like a big silly melon, the two of us looked at each other and could only laugh heartily.

“We held hands and went downstairs, when suddenly under the moonlight, one could see in the garden several basins of particularly lovely and colourful flowers. The petals of these flowers were as yellow as gold and shone brightly. The flower looked like a lotus, but it was not as big as a lotus. The two of us both shared a great passion for flowers, so immediately we went to admire them. Lady Ling felt strange, for she had never seen this type of yellow flower before. We both got closer to smell the flowers, we wanted to know the fragrance of the flowers...”

Di Yun heard Ding Dian recount his past events. Under the moonlight, holding hands and admiring beautiful flowers with the one you love, such an ordeal must have been far greater than even the most pleasant of experiences endured by celestial beings from heaven. However from his intonation, one could sense a gloomy and terrifying side to it. Di Yun listened so attentively that he could not breathe easily, as if there were really evil spirits who wanted to possess your body in the abandoned garden. All of a sudden he thought of a name, and declared: “Golden Ripple Flower!”

Ding Dian uttered a faint and bitter smile from the corner of his mouth. After a while, he said: “Brother, your intelligence is not low. In the future when you wander around the realm by yourself, you should not be at a disadvantage, then I will be at ease.”

Upon hearing these words full of concern and friendship, Di Yun's eyes could not help but brim with tears of excitement. He said angrily: "That dog official from Ling Prefecture, he... he... if he doesn't want to betroth his daughter to you, then so be it. Why set up such a vicious ruse to harm you?"

Ding Dian said: "At that time how would I have guessed? Even more, how would I know that the beautiful yellow flower was in fact the fully toxic 'Golden Ripple Flower?' The two words 'Full Ripple' are Sanskrit for 'demon'. The toxic flower originated from Tianzhu; the citizens of Tianzhu call this flower the 'Demon Flower.' As soon as I sniffed the fragrance of the flower, I felt dizzy. I only saw Lady Ling dazzle and faint. I tried to extend my hands to assist her, but I could barely keep my own balance. Immediately, I began to channel my internal energy to harmonize my body to resist against the poison, when all of a sudden from the shadows appeared several men wielding bladed weapons. I fought several stances with them before my vision turned pitch black. After that I don't know what happened.

"When I woke up, my hands and feet were shackled and my scapula was pierced. Magistrate Ling wore informal clothing and initiated a court trial in the flower hall. Accompanying him were not feudal tenants of the prefecture but were members from his clan. I was obstinate and yelled and screamed. Magistrate Ling ordered men to give me a fierce beating. He wanted to force me to hand over the Heavenly Glow and sword manual.

"What happened after that, you already know. On the fifteenth of every month, Magistrate Ling will order his men to give me a vicious beating, to coerce me to hand over the martial arts and sword manual, but I never once conceded. He was indeed a very patient man."

Di Yun asked: "What about Lady Ling? Why didn't she devise a plan to save you? And after you completed the martial arts of the Heavenly Glow, you could have left prison at any time. Why didn't you go and have a look? Why did you remain in prison until she died?"

Ding Dian's mind suddenly suffered a burst of violent giddiness, his entire body felt like it was floating in the air, dancing in the breeze. He extended his hands and began to scratch frantically for support. Di Yun extended his hands to help him. Ding Dian became startled and repelled him, and said: "My hands are poisonous, don't touch it." Di Yun could only feel sorry inside.

Ding Dian fainted for a while, then gradually regained consciousness. He asked: "What did you say earlier?"

Di Yun suddenly remembered what he wanted to say. "Brother Ding, have you ever considered, that Lady Ling was subjected to her father's injunction, and deceived you deliberately, she wanted to..."

Ding Dian interrupted him with a loud shout. "Bullshit!" With a fist he wanted to hit Di Yun. Di Yun knew that he spoke without discretion and did not defend himself; he was willing to take the hit.

But he did not expect Ding Dian to stop his fist in midair. Ding Dian stared at Di Yun for a short moment then retracted his fists and said: "Brother, only because you suffered misfortune from women do you think that all women in the world are untrustworthy, I will not blame you. If Shuanghua really was under her father's command, and devised a sexual entrapment to try and take my Heavenly Glow and A Deadly Secret, then that would be really easy. Why would she lie to me? She only has to say: 'Give me the Heavenly Glow and A Deadly Secret!' Even if she only so much as implied, so much as hinted that she wanted these things, I would have given it to her right away.

## A Deadly Secret

She could give it to her father, or give it to a beggar on the streets, she could even destroy it or burn it, I would not crease my eyebrows for even a moment. Brother Di, even though these are remarkable treasures in the martial arts world, compared to Shuanghua, in my heart, the Heavenly Glow and A Deadly Secret are nothing more than trash. Ling Tuisi claims to excel in literature and martial arts in vain, he is actually an idiot. If he told her daughter to ask for the treasures, how could I refuse?"

Di Yun said: "Maybe he once told Lady Ling about this, but Lady Ling would not agree."

Ding Dian shook his head. "If something like that really happened, Shuanghua would never hide it from me." He sighed a few times and continued: "A person like Ling Tuisi takes position and wealth, gold and valuables very seriously. He uses himself as a measure for others. He thinks that the rest of the world too thinks so highly of wealth and riches. He thought that if her daughter were to ask me, I would certainly refuse, but it was quite the contrary, for it actually increased my vigilance. There's also another reason: He is an imperial secretary and a magistrate, yet her daughter in secret developed a close relationship with an uncultivated man like me. He must hate me for disgracing his family, and wants to kill me at any cost.

"After he captured me, he immediately began a search on my body, but he did not find anything. He also thoroughly searched my residence but still he could not find anything. Every month on the fifteenth, he would remind me that I would be beaten, he said every possible persuasive word he could think of, he even tried to threaten and intimidate me, but I still did not concede. He could not from my mouth extract even half a word of truth. On the contrary, I actually gained some valuable information from his interrogations. It turns out that 'A Deadly Secret' that Elder Mei Niansheng spoke of, is precisely used to seek out the secrets of Emperor Liang's treasure deposits. Ling Tuisi even tried to send spies into prison and confine them with me in hopes of finding information through tactful indirect questioning. This person pretended to suffer great injustice and would consistently curse Ling Tuisi as a bad person. But right away I could already tell that that person was a fake. Unfortunately at that time I did not yet complete the Heavenly Glow, and I did not have much strength in my body, so I was not as tough as him."

After speaking up to this point, Ding Dian let out a faint smile from the corner of his mouth and said: "You were definitely unlucky to be unjustly beaten by me in vain. If you had not attempted suicide, by now you probably would have been beaten to death."

Di Yun said: "I was framed by others, if not for big brother..."

Ding Dian waved his left hand back and forth, he did not want Di Yun to continue. He said: "It is all chance of fate, in this world everything leads to the word 'fate'."

Ding Dian fixed his eyes on a certain object. Under the moonlight, amidst the debris in the corner of the abandoned garden grew a small purple flower swaying in the wind. It gave off a sense of loneliness and mournfulness. He said: "Help me pluck the flower." Di Yun did as told and handed him the flower.

Ding Dian held on to the small purple flower and said slowly, "With my scapula pierced and my body in prison, I figured everything out. Ling Tuisi most definitely wanted to kill me. The sooner I hand over the sutra and manual, the sooner he would kill me. But if I don't speak, he will actually not kill me, for there is always a chance that I will concede. All he can do is torture me and beat me.

He wants me to suffer the depths of external pain, but he would not actually hit me in my vital areas.”

Di Yun said: “Correct. That day when I pretended to want to kill you, the gaoler actually became alarmed and did not dare to be too vicious.”

Ding Dian held on to the small flower and slowly swayed his fingers. The purple flower too began to sway in the wind. He continued:

“I was confined in prison for well over a month. I became so frustrated and anxious, I nearly went insane. One night a small servant girl approached me. It was actually the close servant girl and chrysanthemum friend of Lady Ling I had encountered from the chrysanthemum meet. She was the reason I met Shuanghua back at Wuchang. I wasn’t sure how much money Shuanghua spent to persuade the gaolers to let the servant girl see me. However, my chrysanthemum friend did not once speak to me, nor did she hand anything to me. She merely stared at me, expressionless. In the gaoler’s hands was a sharp sabre pointed it at her back. I realized that the gaoler was indeed very afraid of Magistrate Ling, so he could only let the girl see me, but would not let her speak.

“My chrysanthemum friend stared at me for a few moments, then slowly, tears began to drip from her eyes. The gaoler gave continuous hand gestures and signalled for her to leave. My chrysanthemum friend saw that in the courtyard outside the prison grew a small chrysanthemum flower. She fetched it for me and handed it to me through the iron fence. She then pointed at the window sill of the distant building outside the prison. A fresh basin of flowers was placed on top of the window sill. My heart became filled with delight, for I knew that the flowers were placed by Shuanghua as a means to keep me company.

“My chrysanthemum friend could not stay any longer and turned her back to leave. She slowly approached the exit, when suddenly from up high, an arrow was shot and pierced right through her heart. She died instantly. It turns out that Ling Tuisi was afraid that my friend would break me out of prison, so he had men prepare an ambush from the roof. A second arrow soon followed, and the gaoler too lost his life. At that time I was scared out of my wits, I was afraid that Ling Tuisi may be so harsh and unreasonable that he may even kill his own daughter. I did not dare to provoke him any further. Every time he came to interrogate me, I pretended to be deaf and mute.

“My chrysanthemum friend died for me. If not for her, how would I have survived these last few years? How would I know that the flowers on the window sill were placed by Shuanghua? However, Shuanghua never once appeared in front of me, she never once peaked from her window to give me a glance. I did not understand why. Sometimes, I even faulted her—how could she be so cruel?

“As a result, I decided to focus my attention on my training. I practiced the Heavenly Glow relentlessly, for I knew that once I complete my training, I would no longer be constrained by these iron chains. I could only hope to escape and take Shuanghua with me to a faraway place. However, the Heavenly Glow was a skill that required exquisite attention, it was not a martial arts that could merely be completed through rigorous training. Furthermore, my scapula was pierced, and my leg muscles were weak, so naturally it was several times harder for me to complete my training than anyone else. It was not until several months ago when you attempted suicide did I finally complete my training fully. I only made it through these desperate times thanks to the consolation of the basin of fresh flowers.

“Ling Tuisi tried so many tactics and techniques to try and sheath my secret. He imprisoned you together with me, it must have been part of his plan. He knows that if he sends a fake person to deceive me, it would never work, so he actually sent a truly innocent young man together with me. As time passes, I would be able to distinguish between true and false. And once I become good friends with you, I would reveal all my secrets to you. Even if he cannot find any information through interrogating me, he could more or less make you his target instead. You are young and ignorant, honest and sincere, if someone pretends to be a good person, you will easily be deceived. However all along I did not trust you, I myself was held captive, my chrysanthemum friend died unjustly, I can trust no one.

“After many years, Ling Tuisi’s position as the magistrate of Jingzhou had been fulfilled; either he would be transferred or promoted to a higher rank. After much consideration, he used money to deny his own promotion and transfer, he did not want a higher rank. All he wanted was the treasure deposit.

“You thought I never went out of prison before? As soon as I completed the Heavenly Glow, that was the first thing I did. However, before I left I sealed your lethargic acupoint, so naturally you did not know.

“I thought that as soon as I jumped over the prison wall, an intense battle was inevitable. However, after so many years, Ling Tuisi no longer maintained such strict defences, the guards outside had dispersed a long time ago. He never would have guessed that Heavenly Glow was indeed so miraculous, even after having my scapula pierced and my leg tendons cracked, I could still complete such a remarkable martial art.

“After I arrived at the window of the high building, my heart began to beat intensely. It seemed that I could remember the feelings I had during the very first time I met her in the same scenario. At last, I gathered up enough courage and knocked on the window three times, yelling ‘Shuanghua!’

“From her dreams she suddenly woke up. In a blur she shouted: ‘Dian’ge! Is it really you? Am I dreaming?’ After so many painstaking days, at last I could finally hear her voice once again. My heart was filled with so much joy I nearly exploded. I trembled in my speech: ‘Shuang’mei, it’s me! I escaped!’ I waited for her to open the window. In the past every time we met I would wait until she opened the window and waved at me before I went in, I never directly ventured into her room before.

“However I did not expect that she would not open the window, she put her face next to the window paper and spoke softly: ‘Thank the heavens and earth, Ding’ge, you are alive and well. My father did not deceive me.’ My voice became bitter and I replied: ‘Yeah, your father did not deceive you. I am still alive. Please open the window, I want to see you.’ She hurriedly said: ‘No, no! I can’t!’ My heart sank instantly, I asked: ‘Why can’t you?’ She said: ‘I promised my father, as long as he doesn’t kill you, I can never see you again. He made me swear it, if I ever see you again, my mother will be bullied by evil spirits in the other world.’ She began to choke with sobs. The year she turned 13 she lost her mother, she treated her mother with utmost respect.

“I really hated Ling Tuisi and his ruthless and cruel nature. The only reason he did not kill me was so he could get my sutra and sword manual, Shuanghua did not even have to swear such a vicious oath. He decided not to kill me, yet he still forced his daughter to pledge never to see me again. This oath turned any of my hopes into mere soap bubbles. But I refused to give up. I said: ‘Shuanghua,

leave with me. You can cover your eyes with a cloth, then you never have to see me again.’ She cried and replied: ‘That doesn’t work either. I don’t want you to see me again.’

The pain and sorrow in my heart I gathered through all these years suddenly exploded all at once, I yelled: ‘Why? I must see you!’ She heard the sadness in my voice and replied gently: ‘Dian’ge, after I found out that you were captured by my father, I begged him relentlessly to set you free. However he decided to engage me to another person so as to fully end our relationship. No matter how I pleaded he would not hear of it. He forced me into submission, thereupon... thereupon... I used a knife and mutilated my own face.’”

When he heard this, Di Yun could not help but let out an “ah” in reply.

Ding Dian said: “I was grateful yet felt pitiful at the same time. With a hard palm I smashed the window with a resounding blow. She was taken aback and closed her eyes. She covered her face with her hands, but I had already seen it all. The most beautiful face under heaven had been disfigured by over a dozen vicious slashes of the knife. Her flesh could be seen, many streaks of fresh red strokes. Her beautiful eyes, her beautiful nose, and her beautiful mouth, all were crooked and mutilated; her appearance was as horrifying as a demon. I extended my hands and hugged her tightly on my chest. She was one who cared greatly for her own image, if not for an inauspicious man like myself, how would she let her face suffer even the slightest bit of damage? I said: ‘Shuang’mei, how can beauty compare to love? Your face was mutilated because of me, in my heart, you are ten times—no, one hundred times—more beautiful than you were before.’ She cried: ‘We have already gotten to this point, how can we still stay together? I promised my father that I would never see you again. Ding’ge... please... please leave!’ I knew that at this point nothing could change what had already happened, I said: ‘Shuang’mei, if I return to prison, all I can see every day are the beautiful basins of flowers you place on the window sill.’ She cried and threw herself to me and declared: ‘Don’t... don’t leave!’

“We cuddled and leaned on each other intimately, we did not speak a single word. She did not dare to look at me, nor did I dare to look at her. Of course, I did not resent her ugliness, but... but... her face was indeed damaged beyond belief. After a very long while, she distanced herself and wept. ‘Ding’ge, I cannot harm my deceased mother. You... you should never see me again.’ I asked: ‘The two of us can never see each other again?’ She cried: ‘We will never meet again! I can only hope that the two of us will be buried together after death. If there is such a kind fellow who can grant me this wish, in the netherworld I will pray to Buddha and bless that person every day.’

“I said: ‘I’ve got it. I know ‘A Deadly Secret’ is precisely the secret of the treasure deposit of Emperor Liang of the Yuan dynasty. I will tell it to you, listen closely.’ She said: ‘I don’t want to remember, why would I want to know it? My father is so obsessed with this treasure that he harmed you greatly. Ding’ge, I don’t want to hear it.’ I said: ‘You have to find an honest and reliable person. If he agrees to fulfill our wish of being buried together, then you can reveal to him the sword mnemonics.’

“She said: ‘For the rest of my life I do not want to leave this building. With such a horrifying appearance, how can I dare to see anyone?’ But after further contemplation, she replied: ‘Fine, tell it to me. Ding’ge, I want to be buried with you at any cost, even if I have to beg someone with this ugly appearance, then so be it.’ Thereupon I told her the sword mnemonics in its entirety. She listened very attentively.

## A Deadly Secret

"Dawn was fast approaching. We said our farewells and departed and I returned to prison. From that point on I could enter or leave the prison at will. But every day I longed to see the flowers she placed on the window, so I never wanted to leave... someone wanted to assassinate Ling Tuisi, and I actually saved him, because... because if Ling Tuisi really died, then Shuanghua would be all alone with nobody left to take care of her..."

As he said this, his voice began to reduce to nothingness.

Di Yun said: "Don't worry big brother, if you really don't recover from this poison, I will bury you together with Lady Ling. However I do not wish to hear these rare sword mnemonics. If you speak then I don't want to listen."

Ding Dian laughed and said: "You are truly a good brother, our friendship was not in vain. Since you promise to bury us together, I can die in peace. I am very happy..." The more he spoke the softer his voice became. He continued: "If you do find the treasure deposit, you do not have to hog all the riches to yourself. Instead, you can use it to assist the many miserable people in this world, people like me or you, under heaven there are plenty. But if you do not listen to 'A Deadly Secret' then upon my death it will disappear forever, isn't that a shame?" Di Yun nodded in approval.

Ding Dian took a very deep breath and said: "Listen closely, I am going to tell you a few numbers, you mustn't get it wrong." Di Yun gave his undivided attention. Ding Dian said: "The first number is '4', the second number is '41', the third number is '33', the fourth number is '53'..."

Di Yun had only begun to immerse himself when suddenly, outside the abandoned garden, approaching footsteps could be heard. Someone said: "Search inside the garden!"

Ding Dian's face changed colors and he suddenly jumped up. Di Yun jumped up as well. From the back door of the abandoned garden approached three vicious men.

## Chapter 4 – Water Spinach



*"What good is it if I see her again? She has a husband and a daughter, they are one happy family. Why would she care about a heartless criminal like myself? If I see her again, wouldn't I simply be inviting a rebuff?"*



Ding Dian gave a sideways glance at the three men across from him and asked: "Brother Di, do you remember the four numbers I just recited?"

Di Yun observed as their three enemies surrounded him in a circle. One of them wielded a sabre and the other wielded a sword. The third was empty-handed, but his face was filled with hatred and aggression. Di Yun looked back and forth and did not answer Ding Dian's question.

Ding Dian reiterated his question again in a louder tone: "Brother Di, do you remember it?"

Di Yun shivered and replied: "The first number is..." He wanted to say "4", but then he thought: "If I say it out loud, won't our enemies hear it?" So instead he raised his left hand and held up four fingers.

Ding Dian acknowledged: "Very good!"

The sabre-wielding man sneered: "The one with the surname Ding, you can be considered an honorable man. Now that we have made it this far, why must you insist on blabbering endlessly like an old effeminate? Quickly follow me and my brothers home so we don't have to resort to violence."

The sword-wielding man added: "Brother Di, we haven't seen each other for many years. How have you been? How is the comfort of prison life?"

Di Yun was shocked, as the sound of this man's voice was awfully familiar. He stared at the man and it came back to him instantly—it was the second disciple of Wan Zhenshan, Zhou Qi. He had not seen him for many years. Di Yun could not recognize him easily, as he now grew a small beard on his upper lip and wore decorous attire. The grief and indignation he suffered for so many years suddenly rushed to his thoughts and his face flushed red. "I know who you are. You are Zhou... Zhou... Second Brother Zhou!" He wanted to utter Zhou Qi's name directly, but instead added the respectful title of "Second Brother" to his surname "Zhou".

Ding Dian could emphasize with how Di Yun felt and shouted: "Good!" They were about to engage in a battle to the death, yet Di Yun was still able to withhold his anger and call him "Second Brother Zhou", hence he thought the latter could not be a violent or disrespectful man." Immediately he continued: "This respectful Second Senior Zhou must be a high ranking disciple under Elder Wan. Very good... very good. When did you become a guard under Magistrate Ling? Brother Di, allow me to introduce: this is 'Ten Thousand Victory Sabre' clan's Ma Daming, Elder Ma. This man over here is from the 'Taixing Clan in Shanxi, his name is 'Twin Sabre' Geng Tianba. It is said that his iron palms are as sharp as a sabre, hence his nickname of 'Twin Sabre'. But the truth is that he actually never wields a weapon."

Di Yun asked: "How are the martial arts of these two?"

Ding Dian replied: "They are third class pugilists. They wish to climb to second class. However, it is a hopeless endeavour."

Di Yun asked: "And why is that?"

Ding Dian answered: "They are only a block of material. Their martial arts aptitude is low and they do not have a renowned martial artist to teach them."

Di Yun continued to ask questions while Ding Dian replied, paying no attention to the people around them. Geng Tianba became impatient and yelled: “You straight mother-thief! You are near the verge of death yet you gossip unnecessarily. Taste my sabre!” When he said “sabre” he really meant his palm. Before he even finished talking his right palm was already unleashed.

Ding Dian’s poison had interrupted his flow for a while and prevented him from being able to exert his full strength, so he did not dare to attack head on and tried to dodge instead. Geng Tianba’s right palm came to nothing, so he took another shot with his left palm. Ding Dian recognized that this technique was the “Changed Momentum Palm”, and hastily turned his hands over to resolve it. But the palm was already unleashed, and the force and momentum was to be reckoned with. With a loud bang, his under arm was hit by Geng Tianba’s right palm. Ding Dian’s body swayed and he spat out a mouthful of fresh blood. Geng Tianba laughed: “What’s the matter? If I am third class, what class are you?”

Ding Dian took a deep breath, then suddenly his internal began to unclog. It turns out that the poison of the “Golden Ripple Flower” had entered his bloodstream and his blood gradually began to coagulate. It flowed slower and slower. Although he had just spat out a mouthful of blood and his internal injuries were not weak, nonetheless the poison in his body came to a temporary halt. He felt pleased and immediately went forward to extend his palm to repel Geng Tianba. Geng Tianba raised his arm and blocked horizontally. Ding Dian made a circular motion with his left hand, and with a loud bang, he slapped Geng Tianba hard on the face. His right hand then followed in a circular motion and hit the top of his opponent’s head with a hard backhand. Geng Tianba yelled out “Aiya!” and rapidly moved backwards. Ding Dian continued to attack as he swiftly extended his right hand and hit Geng Tianba hard on the chest. Geng Tianba yelled out another “Aiya!” and moved back two steps.

Ding Dian’s three palms were filled with the energies of the Heavenly Glow and any single palm could have been enough to instantly kill any first class fighter. However, it was only because Geng Tianba’s external arts were formidable—his internal energy was not impressive—that he was actually able to withstand three palms without collapsing. Ding Dian knew that his death was imminent. Even though he was a man of dignity, and he was already determined to die in the name of love, at this moment he felt like he had no other alternative. He felt like a hero reaching a dead end and he could not help but feel depressed and dejected.

Geng Tianba had been hit by three palm strikes and as such he was startled and began to lose colour. He could feel immense pain on his face, chest, and top of his head. He thought that those three areas were all vital parts of the body. As he did not know how much damage he suffered, he could not help but worry.

Ma Daming gave a glance at Zhou Qi and said: “Brother Zhou, we will fight alongside each other!”

Zhou Qi replied: “Right!” He knew that he was no match for Di Yun, but he had a sword in hand while his opponent was empty-handed. Furthermore, his opponent had lost all the fingers in his right hand and his scapula was broken by iron chains. Even if his martial arts were more profound, he should not be able to unleash it. So he confidently aimed his sword and attacked Di Yun.

Ding Dian knew that Di Yun had not yet completed his training of Heavenly Glow, and at this moment his martial arts was still distant from what he was before he entered prison. To fight bare-

handed against Zhou Qi would be losing his life in vain. Immediately, Ding Dian swayed his body and with his left hand he snatched Zhou Qi's sword. This stance was executed with remarkable speed and was clearly outstanding, as Zhou Qi did not even notice as Ding Dian tapped the pulse on his right arm with the three fingers on his left hand. Zhou Qi became alarmed, as he knew that he had no choice but to let go of the weapon for the fear of losing his life. However, he did not know that the acupoint on his pulse unexpectedly went out of control. At once he swung his long sword backwards and aimed at Ding Dian's chest. Ding Dian swayed his body and dodged and let out a deep sigh.

Ma Daming saw the battle engaged between Ding Dian, Geng Tianba and Zhou Qi. He saw that his comrades had twice gained the upper hand but did not manage to convert it to victory, and his mind began to ponder the reasoning. "Magistrate Ling said that Ding Dian was poisoned; it must be that the poison caused his strength to decrease substantially." Geng Tianba saw that Ding Dian's attempt at snatching the sword fell within the sight of success and he knew that his internal energy was insufficient at this moment. He thought: "The one with the surname Ding has such impressive stances, it is truly a case of the tiger falling in Pingyang<sup>1</sup>... no! His mother! The tiger that falls in Pingyang suffers against the dog: if I compare this prisoner to a tiger, wouldn't that mean that I'm comparing myself to a dog?" The two of them shared the same thoughts and together they attacked Ding Dian.

Di Yun offered his assistance to Ding Dian, but the latter pushed his shoulder back gently and said: "Brother Di, please step back." He stretched forward his left hand and grabbed Ma Daming by the neck. However, this grab only had an average amount of internal energy supporting it, so he squeezed his fingers tightly around his opponent's vulnerable areas, hoping to take his life at any cost. Ma Daming was so scared he felt as if his soul left his body; he scurried off right away.

Ding Dian let out an obscure sigh, for he knew that his own internal energy was getting weaker and weaker. However, as his abilities were still far above that of his opponents, he could continue to hold them off for a short while. If he does not tell "A Deadly Secret" to Di Yun soon, then this secret will soon vanish from the face of the earth forever, and that would be such a pity. He said: "Brother Di, listen to me. Hide behind me and do not care about our enemies, only focus on remembering my mnemonics. This matter is extremely important and we must succeed at any cost. This is precisely the reason how your Brother Ding got to where he is today.

Di Yun complied and moved behind Ding Dian.

Ding Dian continued: "The fifth number is '18'..."

Ma Daming knew that Magistrate Ling issued an order for a search and arrest of Ding Dian. The reason for that was to uncover a martial arts secret that he knew, and so Zhou Qi became a guard under Ling Tuisi both for fame and fortune. He was under orders from his teacher to secretly investigate on "A Deadly Secret". At this moment, when the two of them heard that Ding Dian said the fifth number was "18", they became greatly intrigued and remembered it. They listened as Ding Dian continued to speak: "The sixth number is '7.'" Ma Daming, Zhou Qi, and Di Yun all listened well and remembered these numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese idiom; literal translation "The tiger falls in Pingyang." It means that the man who loses position and influence may be subjected to much indignity.

## Chapter 4 – Water Spinach

Geng Tianba was only under orders to apprehend Ding Dian and was unaware of anything else. He saw Zhou Qi and Ma Daming both paid close attention as they listened to the numbers “17” and “18”. He thought that Ding Dian was just mindlessly mumbling some sort of incantation. He shouted aloud: “Hey, don’t fall for his tricks!” and extended his hands to attack Ding Dian, but he was cautious as he knew that his opponent was formidable, so after one strike he backed off and did not dare to continue.

Ding Dian lost his stability and stroke forward with his legs. Ma Daming aimed his blade at Ding Dian’s shoulders. Ding Dian could only see darkness in front of him and did not know how to evade. Di Yun felt nervous as he watched. In such a desperate situation he did not know how to save Ding Dian, so he rammed his head towards Ma Daming’s chest.

Ding Dian felt faint for a moment. When he opened his eyes again he saw Di Yun and Ma Daming struggling with each other, while Zhou Qi released his sword intending to attack Di Yun from behind. Ding Dian quickly extended his left hand and two fingers and aimed at Zhou Qi’s eyes. Because he knew he was weak, he had to attack a soft spot in order to injure his adversary. Zhou Qi did not have the time to attack, and evaded to the left. Conveniently, Ma Daming attacked Di Yun’s head with his blade at the same time, and knocked him unconscious on the ground. Ding Dian shouted: “Brother Di, the seventh number is...” Before he could say anything, he had to catch his breath as Geng Tianba came at him with another palm. Ding Dian shook his head as he could see a white flash in front. Ma Daming and Zhou Qi were charging at him at the same time. Ding Dian’s body shook violently and he gasped in pain as he was stabbed by their sword and blade at once.

Di Yun screamed violently and rushed in to reinforce. As Ding Dian was gushing out blood, the poison in his system weakened briefly and he took advantage of this: with one palm he smashed Ma Daming’s left cheek, then followed through and his hand over to smash Zhou Qi with his palm. Originally, this palm was certainly going to hit Zhou Qi, but unexpectedly, Geng Tianba threw himself in front and yelled, he blocked Ding Dian’s palm with his chest. The force of this palm was enough to break all his ribs at once and he fell unconscious.

With the remainder of his strength, Ding Dian released another two palm strikes at Ma Daming, and the latter died instantly. Geng Tianba’s breathing slowly fainted. The only one who did not sustain any injuries was Zhou Qi. He grabbed his sword with his left hand and faked it at Ding Dian’s direction, then followed by aiming at Di Yun. Ding Dian pushed himself forward and hugged Zhou Qi tightly with both his arms and shouted: “Brother Di, leave quickly!” Zhou Qi stabbed into Ding Dian’s flesh several inches.

However, Di Yun was not inclined to leave alone. He threw himself at Zhou Qi’s back and choked him and said: “Let go of Brother Ding!” However, he did not realize that it was Ding Dian who got a hold of his opponent, and thought that it was Zhou Qi who did not want to release Brother Ding.

Ding Dian was slowly running out of breathe and he could not keep hold of his enemy much longer. Should he let his opponent draw his long sword and break out of his grip, Di Yun would most certainly die. He shouted: “Brother Di, do not worry about me, I won’t make it!”

Di Yun replied: “If you die, we will die together!” As he said that, he exerted all his strength to choke Zhou Qi. However, because his shoulders were previously pierced by the scapula, his muscles sustained severe damage. No matter how hard he tried, he could not make his opponent suffocate.

Ding Dian said: "My good brother, you are very honorable... I do not regret making friends with you. In regards to the sword manual... it is unfortunate I could not reiterate it fully. I am very happy... 'Spring Water Jade Ripple' ... that basket of green chrysanthemums... ah! She placed it by the window... look at how beautiful it is... that chrysanthemum..." His voice slowly dissipated, the color of his face gradually faded, and he let go of his hold on Zhou Qi. Zhou Qi used his strength and pulled the long sword out of Ding Dian's flesh. The edge of the blade was full of fresh blood and he quickly turned around. He was within a foot of Di Yun; he laughed maliciously and, holding his sword in his hand, aimed to stab at Di Yun's chest.

Di Yun shouted loudly: "Brother Ding! Brother Ding!" Suddenly, his chest felt a sharp pain. He looked down and saw Zhou Qi's long sword pointing at his chest. He heard the complacent laugh of his opponent: "Haha! Haha!"

At this moment, his mind reflected on the numerous events of his life. He remembered practicing under his master's tutelage, he remembered his good relationship with his martial sister Qi, and how that was closely followed by the injustice he received at Wan Zhenshan's residence and the miserable five years he spent in prison. All these various incidents came to his mind at once. Full of grief and indignation, he uttered: "I... I will take you down with me!" and extended his arms to grab Zhou Qi's garment. Although he had not completed his training of the Heavenly Glow, he did have two years of foundation. At this moment he knew that he would soon perish, and gathered all the energy in his body to his arm, and strangled his opponent with all his might, like a pair of iron chains. Zhou Qi felt his breathing become urgent and tried to pull away, but to no avail.

Di Yun felt his increasing pain in his chest but he did not care. He used his full strength and squeezed on Zhou Qi. Whether or not he wanted to strangle his opponent to death at this moment, he did not even know, but he would definitely not release his grip on Zhou Qi. Although the long sword did not stab him further, it apparently met something that it could not pierce, and the blade actually gradually began to arch, bending slowly. Zhou Qi became worried and felt strange, he was exerting all his strength on his right arm to pull out his sword. He had intended to stab Di Yun with his long sword, but he still had another half an inch to go but the sword would not budge.

Di Yun's eyes were filled with rage as he gazed at Zhou Qi, whose face was filled with cruelty and complacency. But it slowly became an expression of astound and fright, then gradually, it became an expression of fear and worry, before degenerating into an expression of indescribable horror.

Zhou Qi had already pierced through Di Yun, but it only pierced his flesh several inches and did not manage to cause any critical damage. He tried three times to use the inner strength in his right arm to attack Di Yun, but he still could not pierce his blade any further. Under great fright, he no longer cared about killing his opponent, he only wanted to escape. However, Di Yun's grip on him was too strong and he could not get away.

Zhou Qi felt his right arm begin to bend, his sword hilt pressed against his own chest. The blade became increasingly curved and formed a half-circle. Suddenly, with a loud clap, the sword broke in half. Zhou Qi shouted, moved a few steps backwards and fell over himself. The two pieces of the broken sword stabbed into his stomach.

Zhou Qi fell down, causing Di Yun to fall down on top of him, while still maintaining his grip on his body with both arms. Di Yun could smell the strong scent of blood. He looked and saw tears flowing

from Zhou Qi's eyes, followed by fresh blood flowing out from his mouth, his head facing the side. Zhou Qi was completely motionless.

Di Yun was shocked; he was worried that his opponent was feigning death, so he did not dare to release his grip. However, as he felt that the pain in his chest had stopped and saw that blood was continuously flowing from Zhou Qi's mouth, he reluctantly released his arms and stood up. He saw that two parts of the broken sword were stabbed into Zhou Qi's stomach, only the sword hilt and edge of the sword was visible. He looked lower at his own chest and saw his outer garment was pierced and revealed the layer of black colored undergarment.

He looked at the sword wounds of Zhou Qi a few times, and looked at the wounds on his chest, and suddenly came to a conclusion: it turns out that it was the dark silkworm vest that saved his life, and consequently helped him kill his enemy. Di Yun panicked and instantly turned around and ran towards the side of Ding Dian. "Brother Ding... Brother Ding... how do you feel?" Ding Dian slowly opened his eyes, but there was no vigor or spirit in his expression. It was as if he did not even see him, or did not remember who he was. Di Yun continued: "Brother Ding... I said I will save you no matter the cost."

Ding Dian replied softly: "Unfortunately... unfortunately the sword manual... from this point on... it will vanish... join me with... Shuanghua..."

Di Yun exclaimed: "Don't worry! I remember... I will definitely bury you and Shuanghua together, in order to fulfill your wish."

Ding Dian slowly closed his shut, his breathing became faint, but his lips were still moving as if he had something more to say. Di Yun put his ears by Ding Dian's lips and vaguely heard him whisper, "The eleventh number..." but at that point there was no longer any noise; Di Yun could no longer feel Ding Dian's breath by his ears. He extended his hand to feel Ding Dian's chest, but there was no more heartbeat.

Di Yun already knew that Ding Dian was unlikely to survive, but it had to happen for him to truly understand that the friend he had for so many years had finally passed away. He knelt beside Ding Dian's body and breathed constantly into his mouth. In his mind he continuously prayed: "Heaven, Heaven, if you let Brother Ding come back to life, I am willing to return to prison and never come out again. I am willing to forget about revenge... I am willing to be forever humiliated by the Wan clan's students. Heaven... please... please let Brother Ding come back to life..." He felt with his hands that Ding Dian's hands became stiffer as his internal temperature decreased, and realized that all of his wishes were fruitless.

At this moment, he felt inexpressible loneliness: he felt that the carefree and leisurely nature of the outside world was many times more dreadful than the prison cell, that the coming days would only be more and more difficult. He wished that he and Ding Dian could return to their prison cells and never step foot outside again. He hugged Ding Dian's corpse and stood up, the thoughts of vast and limitless suffering and sorrow came surging to his head. He let out a very loud cry, a cry that he could no longer hold back, a cry that he no longer wished to hold back. He did not consider the possibility that such a loud cry would lure soldiers to him, nor did he consider that he could ever cry so pitifully. He only knew that he could no longer suppress the sorrow in his heart, that he could no longer suppress his cry.

When his tears dried up and his loud cries of sorrow became soft and quiet sobs, his mind became clearer, and he began to ponder: "What should I do with Brother Ding's body? How will I bury him together with Lady Ling's coffin?" At this point in time, there was nothing more important to him than fulfilling his promise to Ding Dian.

All of a sudden, the neighing sounds of horses were heard from the distance; about a dozen horses altogether. He heard someone remark: "Elder Ma, Elder Geng, Second Elder Zhou, have you found the escapists yet?" There were a dozen or so horses parked outside the abandoned garden.

One of the riders said: "Come have a look!"

Another said: "They won't hide in a place like this."

The first person replied: "How would you know?" This person dismounted his horse, his boots gnashing against the ground.

Di Yun did not want to think further. He carried Ding Dian's body and exited through the abandoned garden's side door. He was about to come across another door when he heard the exclamations and shouts of the riders who discovered the bodies of Ma Daming, Geng Tianba, and Zhou Qi.

Di Yun was moving around violently in Jiangling. He knew that he could not get very far while carrying Ding Dian's body, and he knew that someone could find him at any time. But he would rather be captured, rather be tortured cruelly—he would rather be executed instantly—than abandon Brother Ding.

He ran for several hundred feet and saw on his left hand side a ramp that led to a small door; he kicked the door open and went in. What he saw inside was an enormous vegetable garden, filled with carrots, eggplants, and many other vegetables. He had been close to agriculture since childhood, but he had been separated from these fruits and vegetables for five years. Upon seeing these again, he could not help but feel a warm and intimate feeling in his heart.

He looked around all four directions, and saw on the northeast corner was a building used for firewood. Through the window he could see the pinewoods and straws that filled the room. He bent over and picked up a few carrots, then carried Ding Dian's body into the room. He listened closely and could hear no noise around him, so he pushed the firewood aside and placed the corpse down carefully, discreetly covering it with straws. In his mind, he was still hoping: "Who can say for sure? Maybe Brother Ding will suddenly wake up."

He peeled the skin off the carrot and took a big bite. The taste of raw carrots were sweet and spicy, the juice flowing down his throat. For five years he had not eaten a carrot. He reminisced the days of Hunan in the countryside. He could not even count how many times he and his martial sister Qi would pull out carrots in the open fields and eat them together.

He took another bite of the carrot, eating one after another. His eyes began to feel a bit moist. Suddenly, from the distance he could hear a voice. His whole body began to tremble, the remaining half of the carrot he was holding in his hand dropped to the ground. The whiteness of the carrot became contaminated with the straw fragments and dirt of the ground.

## Chapter 4 – Water Spinach

He could hear a melodious and fragile noise, calling out, “Water Spinach, Water Spinach, where are you?”

At that point he wanted to exclaim, “I’m here!” But he only uttered the word “I” halfway before he choked and swallowed it down his throat. He covered his mouth with his hands and his body trembled slightly.

This is because “Water Spinach” is his nickname. In this world, only he and his martial sister Qi knew of it—even their teacher did not know. Qi Fang told him that he was slow; honest but lacked creativity. Apart from training in martial arts, he did not know or care about anything else. She said that his heart was as hollow as a water spinach.

Di Yun chuckled slightly; he adored the “Water Spinach” nickname given to him. Every time he heard the name “Water Spinach”, his heart would fill with intense warmth and sweetness. This is because when a third person was at the scene, his martial sister would never call him by such a name. If she was calling him “Water Spinach”, that means the two of them are alone together.

When they are together, regardless of whether she was happy or sad, Di Yun felt a kind of happiness that he could not express in words. Indeed, he was a slow person who wasn’t good with words. Sometimes his expressions of slowness would cause Qi Fang to be mad, but when she called him “Water Spinach”, the two of them could not help but burst into laughter.

He remembered the time when Bu Yuan was at their teacher’s residence to deliver a message, his martial sister cooked to serve the guests. Among the foods there were chicken and fish, carrots and tofu, and a big bowl of water spinach. That night, when Bu Yuan and his teacher were drinking and discussing the recent events of the martial world, in a daze he incidentally saw Qi Fang. He saw her hold a water spinach with her chopsticks and placed it near her mouth, yet not eating it. She used her soft red lips to gently make contact with the water spinach; her eyes filled with delight. She was not intending to eat the water spinach, but rather kissing the several strips of spinach. At that time Di Yun thought: “Martial sister is happy that I am Water Spinach.”

Now in the firewood room, in his mind suddenly came a flashbulb moment; he realized the intent of her kissing the water spinach. The voice calling for “Water Spinach” sounded very much like the voice of his martial sister Qi, this much he knew. He was certain that it was not his own hallucination that caused his misjudgment.

“Water Spinach, Water Spinach, where are you?” The sound of this voice embodied a great amount of tenderness and exorbitant love. No, not only that; when martial sister Qi used to call him by this name, her voice was not only filled with friendship, intimacy, and relations, it also contained traces of willfulness, annoyance, and condemnation. Yet today’s voice of “Water Spinach” was completely filled with a deep sense of love. “She must know that I have suffered an unspeakable amount of misery and suffering throughout these years, that’s why she’s treating me nicer. That must be it.”

However, he did not dare to trust what he heard: “I am dreaming, why would martial sister be here? She has already married Wan Gui, why would she be looking for me?”

However, the voice called out again and again, each time getting louder as it approached closer: “Water Spinach, where are you hiding? You think I can’t catch you?” The voice was still filled with love and tenderness.



Di Yun began to feel all the veins in his body pop up; he began to feel short on breathe and he could not hold it anymore, his palms were filled with sweat. He got up, hid behind the straws, and peaked through the window to look outside. He saw a girl with her back turned against him, trying to look for someone. Without a doubt—with her slim shoulders and tender waists, her slightly tall but thin stature—it was definitely his martial sister.

He heard her say, "Water Spinach, why don't you come out?" Suddenly, she turned around.

Di Yun could not believe what he was seeing. He felt a little faint. The woman in front of him was indeed Qi Fang. The jet-black yet shiny pupils, the slightly elevated nose... her face was whiter than before—unlike the rosy-color she had back at Hunan in the countryside—but this was indeed his martial sister. It was certainly his martial sister, the one he longed for in prison for so many years, the one he loved from an unreachable distance, the one he was angry at.

Her face still contained laughter as she said: "Water Spinach, will you come out now?"

When he heard this welcoming and adoring voice calling for him, he was exulted beyond control. He wanted to answer to this call, he wanted to once again see the martial sister he was thinking and longing of all this time, but when he took the first step, he remembered: "Brother Ding always told me that my honesty and honour made it too easy for me to fall into other people's traps. Martial sister has already married the son of the Wan family, and today Zhou Qi died by my hands, how do I know she is not trying to lure me out of hiding?" As he pondered further, he did not take another step.

But he heard Qi Fang shout again: "Water Spinach, Water Spinach!" Di Yun was in a state of confusion, he thought: "The way she utters these words is filled with deep love and admiration, it is definitely not fake. Furthermore, even if she wants to take my life, I am willing to die by her hands. He decided to abandon his earlier thoughts and took a second step forward, when suddenly he heard the crisp voice of a little girl who said: "Mama, mama, I am over here!"

Di Yun was shocked; he peeked through the window sill. He saw a girl dressed in bright red approaching from the east. She was young, so her steps were careless and her movements were unstable. He heard the gentle voice of Qi Fang said: "Water Spinach, where are you hiding? Mama can't find you."

The little girl replied: "Water Spinach is at the garden, Water Spinach is looking at ants!"

Di Yun's ears felt as if he heard a really sharp noise, his heart felt as if it was hit by a fist with all its might. "Is it really true that martial sister gave birth to a daughter? And she called her daughter 'Water Spinach'? When she called for 'Water Spinach' she was really calling for her daughter, and not me?" Was it really the case that I stepped into the Wan residence by sheer coincidence?"

In all these years, deep in his heart he always had a wish. He hoped that one day he would discover that his martial sister did not actually marry Wan Gui, that Shen Cheng was lying to him the whole time. He never dared to tell this wish to Ding Dian, and only buried it deep inside his heart. Sometimes he would dream of this in the middle of the night, only to wake up with his heart pounding at an alarming rate. But at this point, he finally saw it with his own eyes and ears, this little girl calling her "mama".

## Chapter 4 – Water Spinach

His vision became blurred by the tears in his eyes and he could barely make out what was happening through the window. He saw Qi Fang crouched on the ground with her arms open wide. The girl laughed as she was being embraced. Qi Fang kissed the little girl on the cheek, smiled and softly said: "Water Spinach will play by herself now, such a good girl!"

Di Yun could only see the side of Qi Fang's face. He could see her thin and lengthy eyebrows and the curvature of her lips. Her cheeks were fuller and whiter than it was several years ago. Di Yun felt a sense of bitterness inside his heart and thought: "These last few years she has become the woman of the Wan family, naturally she no longer needs to farm by the countryside, no longer needs to be scorched and drenched by the sun and rain, of course she would be healthier and well."

He heard Qi Fang say: "Water Spinach, don't play anymore. Follow mama to your room."

The little girl replied: "It's fun here, Water Spinach wants to watch the ants."

Qi Fang said: "No, today there are bad people outside, looking to kidnap children. Water Spinach is better off returning to her room."

The little girl asked: "What bad people? Why would they kidnap little children?"

Qi Fang got up and grabbed the little girl by her hand and said: "Two escaped convicts escaped from prison and they are very, very bad people. Your papa went to catch these bad people. If these bad people come in, they will kidnap Water Spinach. Water Spinach, please listen to mama and go play in your room. Mama will make a doll for you, okay?"

But the little girl was hesitant, and said: "Don't want a doll, Water Spinach wants to help papa catch bad people."

When Di Yun heard Qi Fang call himself a "bad person", his heart sank even deeper. At this precise moment, there were sounds of several horses approaching. Qi Fang pulled out her long sword from the sheath on her waist and went to the door of the backyard. Di Yun remained by the window and did not dare to move, for he was afraid to make noise and shock Qi Fang. No matter what he should not see his martial sister again, his heart was filled with grief and indignation that was hard for him to suppress. He had never done anything wrong, yet for no reason he received some of the greatness suffering in this world. She even declared him a "bad person".

Di Yun saw the little girl approach the front door of the firewood room. He hoped that she would not enter the room, but the little girl for some reason unexpectedly stepped foot into the room. Di Yun hid his face amongst the straws at the back, and said to himself: "Get out! Get out!"

Suddenly, the little girl saw him. She sneaked a brief glance at his face: the facial hair that covered his face made for a frightening appearance. She was so startled she had a blank expression and her eyes were fully wide open. She wanted to cry out but did not dare to.

Di Yun knew he was in trouble, for if the little girl were to cry, he would definitely be discovered by Qi Fang. In an instant he reached forward and grabbed the little girl with his left hand, and with his right hand he covered her mouth. However, he was too slow, as the girl managed the utter an "Ah" and let out a cry. But her cry was cut half way by Di Yun when he grabbed her.

Although Qi Fang kept her attention at the outskirts of the garden, she heard the sound of the little girl's cry and immediately turned around, but the girl was nowhere to be seen. Then as she heard the slight rustling sound of straws in the firewood room, she immediately made two big strides forward into the firewood room and saw that a man covered with fluffy facial hair and blood stains had captured her daughter, covering her mouth with one hand.

Qi Fang was so shocked that for a second she felt as if she lost her soul. Immediately, she released her long sword, aimed it at Di Yun and scolded: "Release the girl at once!"

Di Yun felt more bitterness in his heart, as if he had abandoned himself in despair. He thought: "If you want to kill me, then go ahead!" He saw her long sword approaching him but did not dodge.

Qi Fang was stunned and was afraid that she would hurt her own daughter, so she retracted her long sword. Then she repeated: "Let go of my daughter!"

Di Yun listened as she kept on demanding him to release her daughter, without any regards to their past relationship. In a fit of rage, he refused to let go of the girl, and conveniently picked up a long wooden stick amongst the wooden branches. He used it to hit the long sword of Qi Fang, then backed away one step.

As Qi Fang saw that the violent man would not release her daughter, she became more and more frightened and anxious; both her knees started to feel limp and weak. She took a deep breath and attacked Di Yun, aiming to pierce his right shoulder. Di Yun dodged the attack by moving his body, and with his right hand he wielded the wooden stick as his sword. He aimed downwards from his right shoulder and stabbed backwards.

Qi Fang was perplexed, for she felt this stance was awfully familiar. It was indeed her father's stance of "Brother Weng Shouts Up". However, at that moment she did not think too much of it. She lowered her head to dodge, and with her long sword executed the two stances "The Tiger's Rapid Kick Alarms the Wind", and "The Mountain Escapes Like a Cloth".

The firewood room was actually very narrow and small; it was further piled up by stacks of firewood and straws. The remaining space was barely enough room for two people to cycle around, so when these stances were executed, it felt a bit unnatural and hindered.

Since they were young, Di Yun and Qi Fang had been practicing swords under the same teacher. There was not a single day where they wouldn't be practicing swords; so naturally, these stances were executed thoroughly and without error. Upon seeing these two stances, Di Yun naturally followed through with what their teacher had taught them. He executed the stances "Falling Mud Welcomes Big Sister" and "The Horse Blows a Little Wind". The wooden stick spread widely around the room as performed these stances.

Back in the days when these two martial siblings were practicing swords, this would be the point where Qi Fang could no longer endure. But this time when Di Yun scraped the wooden stick around the third time, his wrist felt an immense pain, and with a loud clap, the wooden stick fell on the floor. He was shocked, but then he immediately realized: "The fingers on my right hand have been sliced clean; I should never be able to wield a sword again, how can I forget?"

## Chapter 4 – Water Spinach

When he lifted his head up, he saw Qi Fang's long sword was aimed directly within an inch of his chest. The blade of the sword did not tremble in the least, her expression shocked and dumbfounded, it was truly hard to describe. The two stared at each other intently for a very long time and neither uttered a single word. Finally, Qi Fang broke the silence and said: "Is... is it you?" Her voice sounded hoarse and astringent.

Di Yun nodded in reply, and handed over the little girl that he was holding with his left arm. Qi Fang dropped her long sword and rushed to hug the little girl, she did not know what to say. The little girl was so scared that she could not even cry. She buried her face in her mother's embrace and no longer dared to look at Di Yun. Qi Fang said: "I... I didn't know it was you. All these years..."

Suddenly, from outside came the loud voice of a man who shouted: "Fang'mei, Fang'mei! Where are you?" It was Wan Gui, the sound of his shouts getting more intense as he approached the direction of the vegetable garden. Qi Fang's face instantly changed color, then she told her daughter, "Water Spinach, this uncle is not a bad person. Don't tell your papa, okay?"

The little girl lifted her head and gave a sideways glance at Di Yun. She saw his frightening appearance and expression, and suddenly uttered a "wah" and began to cry. The man outside heard the sound of the girl's cry, and said: "Water Spinach, don't cry. Papa is here!"

Qi Fang gave Di Yun a look then turned around and began to walk away. She carried her daughter in her arms and pushed open the front door. Di Yun was stunned and stood there motionless. It felt as if there was a noise inside his head constantly telling him, "I might as well die, I might as well die!"

He heard the sound of the man outside, who asked: "Why is Water Spinach crying?" Di Yun wanted to move over to the window to take a look; he wanted to know what Wan Gui looks like now, but he felt as if his legs were nailed to the floor and he could not make another step.

He heard Qi Fang's cheerful voice as she said: "I was playing with Water Spinach at the back when two horses passed through. The men on horseback wielded sharp weapons and looked extremely vicious. Water Spinach said they were bad people that wanted to kidnap her. She was so afraid she started to cry."

Wan Gui laughed: "Those were the escaped convicts from the prefecture. Come, papa will hug Water Spinach. Papa has killed the bad people. Water Spinach does not need to be afraid. Papa has killed each and every bad person."

Di Yun was startled. He thought: "A woman's ability to tell lies is impressive. With the way she said it, even if the little girl claims she saw a bad person, her husband would not be suspicious. Hmph, why do I need you to lie for me? Go ahead and come get me, kill me if you want."

He took two steps and looked out the window. He saw Wan Gui dressed in gorgeous attire, carrying the little girl and walking away. Qi Fang too leaned on his shoulders, the appearance of an affectionate family.

His martial sister has already married Wan Gui. In the past, Di Yun had considered this possibility many thousand times, but had always hoped that it wasn't true. But at this moment, he saw this intimate family all with his very own eyes. He opened his mouth to utter "I...", then he bent over to pick up the long sword that Qi Fang had left behind. He wanted to rush outside and engage in a duel

to the death with Wan Gui. The time he spent in prison—the time he spent suffering endless injustices and miseries—was all because of this wicked man who framed him. Furthermore, the one he loved more than his own life had now become the wife of this man. At this point he no longer had any desires. Either he would go ahead and kill this man, or he would die by his blade.

But when he turned his body and bent over, he saw amidst the firewood and straws laid Ding Dian's body. He saw Ding Dian's eyes closed shut; the expression on his face appeared serene. He suddenly remembered: "Before he died, Brother Ding repeatedly told me to bury him together with Lady Ling. Even if I were to perish in a battle against Wan Gui, my life is not worth mentioning, but Brother Ding's final wish would not be fulfilled." And then he thought further: "I could beg martial sister to complete this task for me, she may be able to do it... bah! Di Yun, you insolent fool, the task you refuse to undertake on your own, you would rather let someone else do it for you? If you die now, how can you have any face to see your Brother Ding? Even if martial sister had a guilty conscience, she would still fulfill this task for you." He thought more about it, and eventually was able to slowly suppress his desire for revenge.

However, the word "I" he uttered earlier had already caught the attention of Wan Gui, who remarked: "It sounds like there may be someone in that room."

Qi Fang replied: "Is that so? Just a moment ago I saw Old Wang go in to move the firewood. Gui'ge, I stewed some bird's nest soup for you, why don't you go and eat it? Besides, Water Spinach is still crying endlessly, we should let her get some good rest."

Wan Gui groaned and said: "The one in the room is really the chef Old Wang?" He continued to walk down the path with his daughter and wife.

Di Yun's mind was dazed and empty, he did not know what to think. After a very long time, he scratched his head and thought: "I cannot hide in this room for very long. If the chef by the name of Old Wang really does come, then what will I do? I should secretly hide Brother Ding and then sneak out myself. When night falls, I will come back to retrieve Brother Ding's body. Yes, that's what I'll do."

However, he only took one step when his thoughts in his mind stopped him further. "Martial sister will certainly come back for me, if I leave now, I may never see her again." "What good is it if I see her again? She has a husband and a daughter, they are one happy family. Why would she care about a heartless criminal like myself? If I see her again, wouldn't I simply be inviting a rebuff?" "Hah, for so many years in prison, day and night I have been longing to see her just once, so how can I forfeit this opportunity today? Do I have any other wishes? Maybe I can ask her how our teacher is doing? I want to ask her, how can she like the new and hate the old, after I suffered repeated tragedies, how can she no longer care for me?" "What's the point of me asking anyway? She won't tell any lies, and only speak the truth. But even if she does lie, what does it matter? If she speaks the truth, I will only be hurt even more."

His thoughts went back and forth consistently for some time. At once he wanted to leave, but he could not fully make up his mind. He was usually a straightforward person and definitely not the type who could not settle with a decision. Yet today he when he was faced with the greatest decision in his life, he did not know what to decide. He knew the risks of staying, but also knew that he would regret leaving.

## Chapter 4 – Water Spinach

As he continued to contemplate in his mind, he suddenly heard faint footsteps in the garden. This person seemed to be tiptoeing quietly. Every few steps that were taken, this person would stop before moving another few steps. This person's movements were obvious extremely cautious as if afraid to be discovered.

As this person approached closer and closer, Di Yun's heart beat faster and faster. He thought: "Martial sister has finally come back for me. But what does she want to say to me? Does she want to beg for my forgiveness? Perhaps she still cherishes our past relationship?" Then he thought further, "What do I have to say to her? Sigh, forget it. Forget it. She has a good husband, a good daughter, she is living a very happy life. I never want to see her again."

All of a sudden, his heart was filled with desires of revenge. He felt ice-cold. "Originally I was just some poor folk in the countryside, supposing if I did not receive any injustice, martial sister and I would become husband and wife. Although I would be very happy, martial sister would spend the rest of her life working and exhausted, what good is that for her? If I want revenge, do I have to kill Wan Gui? Martial sister would become a widow, how can she marry me? How can she marry the one who killed her husband? For a long time she has already forgotten about me. In the past I could not compare to Wan Gui. Today, the difference is that of heaven and earth. I should forget about revenge and forget everything that's happened. I should let their family of husband and wife and daughter live happily ever after."

After he thought up to this point, he decided that he no longer wished to speak with Qi Fang. He turned around and reached for Ding Dian's body when suddenly, with a ferocious roar and a loud bang, the door was kicked open. Di Yun was completely taken aback. He turned around and saw the reflection of a long sword wielded by a tall but thin man standing by the door—it was none other than Wan Gui. Di Yun took a deep breathe, then he leaned over to grab the long sword that Qi Fang had left behind.

Wan Gui appeared to be very furious. He had already known about Di Yun escaping from prison and had been feeling ill-at-ease for the whole day; now when he saw that the sword Di Yun was holding belonged to Qi Fang, he felt jealous and angry at the same time. He spoke coldly: "Hah! Meeting up in the firewood room, she even gave you her weapon. Planning to kill her own husband? I'm afraid it won't be so easy!"

Di Yun's thoughts were all over the place, and for a moment he did not understand what Wan Gui was saying. He thought: "Why did he come? How did he know that I'm here? Naturally, it must have been Qi Fang who told him this, telling her husband to arrest me in order to claim the rewards. How can she be so cold and heartless?"

Wan Gui saw that Di Yun did not respond, and knew that he was scared, and aimed at his chest with his long sword. Di Yun blocked with his sword, and naturally executed the stance that the old beggar taught him many years ago, "Stabbing Throat Stance". In an instant the long sword was pointing at Wan Gui's throat. This technique was extremely strange. In the past, Wan Gui was unable to counter this stance; now after five years, even though his martial arts has seen significant improvement, he was still unable to counter this stance.

Wan Gui was so stunned that he did not know what to do with the long sword in his hand. He would not have enough time to counter, and if he made the slightest move his opponent would have seized him at once. At this point, his life was at mercy of his opponent. He was extremely furious at this

outcome and did not dare to make the slightest move. As he looked at Di Yun's face full of dirt and facial hair, his expression of hate gradually became fear.

Di Yun was hesitant to strike him with his sword, thinking to himself: "Should I kill him or not?"

Wan Gui saw the hesitation and perplexity in Di Yun's face. In a moment of desperation, the sword on his wrist began to tremble slightly. Suddenly, he came up with an idea and shouted: "Qi Fang, you have come!"

Di Yun heard him yell out Qi Fang loudly, and his heart was startled. He turned his head slightly to look at the side. He did not realize that he had fallen into Wan Gui's trap. As soon as Di Yun turned his head, Wan Gui immediately lifted up his long sword and countered. Because the fingers on Di Yun's right hand had been sliced clean, he could not maintain a good grip of his sword. As such, his sword fell out of his hands. Wan Gui was excited at this turn of events and immediately stroked forward with his sword. Di Yun dodged a few blows, and retreated to the pile of wood. He picked up one of the pieces of hard firewood in the pile and used it as a weapon and began to attack. Wan Gui too attacked, and the two weapons clashed, causing a piece of the wooden stick to be hacked off. Di Yun threw the remaining half of his stick at Wan Gui with enough force, so his opponent had to dodge it. Then he conveniently picked up another stick from the pile and attacked again.

Wan Gui saw that since Di Yun lost his sword, as long as he remained cautious he should win. Even if Di Yun uses a wooden stick as a sword and managed to hit him a few times, it would be no big deal. He remained focused and stayed sharp, then began to execute his sword stances to attack. After several stances, Di Yun let out a sharp cry as his right wrist was struck by a sword. Immediately, blood began gushing out of the wound. He no longer had any strength in his right hand, and the wooden stick fell out of his hands. Wan Gui followed through by stabbing his leg, then lifted his left foot and kicked him hard. Di Yun struggled and tried to climb back up, but Wan Gui kicked him again, this time on his cheekbone. Di Yun immediately fainted.

Wan Gui scolded, "Playing dead?" and followed through by stabbing Di Yun on his right shoulder. However, he saw that his opponent did not budge at all, and realized that he had really passed out. He thought to himself: "Magistrate Ling is offering five thousand taels of silver as a reward. If I am to capture these two prisoners, it is better off if I leave them alive. Besides, once I take them back to the prefecture, they would be extremely lucky should they be kept alive. Why should I be the one to kill them?" He gave a sideways glance and saw that the pile of straws exposed a leg. He was both startled and excited at the same time, shouting: "There's someone in there!" He did not realize that Ding Dian was already dead, and in his excitement stabbed hard at the leg of the corpse.

Even though Di Yun was knocked out, there was a voice in his head that repeatedly shouted: "I can't die! I can't die! I promised Brother Ding that I would bury his body together with Lady Ling!" This thought was so intense that it caused him to quickly recover consciousness. He was bewildered and thought: "Several years ago, one night, he knocked me out cold before and my head suffered damages from his kicks." As he slowly opened his eyes, he saw Wan Gui was about to stab at Ding Dian's body. At this point he was not fully conscious, and did not process his thoughts clearly. But as soon as he saw Wan Gui pull Ding Dian's corpse out of the pile of straws, he shouted: "Brother Ding!" All of a sudden, his entire body was filled with energy, and he immediately threw himself at Wan Gui's back, with his right arm choking at his throat.

## Chapter 4 – Water Spinach

Wan Gui did not see this coming. He wanted to stab backwards with his sword, but there was no way for his wrist to curve at such an angle. He slashed with his sword but only managed to slash the pile of wood in front of him, and the lock that Di Yun had on his throat was getting tighter and tighter. When Di Yun saw that his nemesis was attacking Ding Dian's body, he became extremely furious. This person had not only caused him a lot of injustice, but also took Qi Fang away from him. Not even mentioning that part of revenge, he was now disrespecting Ding Dian, a matter that definitely could not be put to rest.

At this point, he had no other wishes, he only wanted to strangle his opponent to death. However, he noticed that after a while, he was gradually losing energy trying to hold down Wan Gui. This was due to the fact that Di Yun had suffered numerous injuries and his wounds were bleeding. Furthermore, the strength of his wrist was being reduced significantly. He said to himself: "I only have to hold him a bit longer, then I will be able to kill him." Soon, he felt as if he was seeing stars in his eyes; he began to feel very dizzy and faint, and eventually he lost consciousness. Although he passed out, the arm that was holding down Wan Gui did not retract. Wan Gui found it so difficult to breathe, that at the time Di Yun passed out, he too lost consciousness at the same time.

They both lied on the ground, facing each other, unconscious. It looked as if both of them were dead. However, their hearts were still beating and there was breathe coming out from their mouths and noses.

It is truly unpredictable what fate has to offer. Should Di Yun be the one to wake up first, he would immediately pick up the long sword and kill Wan Gui with one slash. However, if Wan Gui should be the one to wake up first, he would no longer have the intent of capturing Di Yun alive for the reward, as it would be too risky. He too, would end Di Yun's life with one slash to the neck.

Anything can happen in this world. It is not necessarily the case that good fortune will come to good people, nor is it the case that bad fortune will befall on bad people. Likewise, bad people may not necessarily have good fortune, and good people may not necessarily have bad fortune. In the end, everyone has to die, but the ones who die later may not necessarily be blessed with good fortune.

But from the perspective of the people alive, from the perspective of Qi Fang and her daughter, the outcome of this battle would be extremely significant. If at this point Qi Fang were to choose, if she had to pick just one person to wake up first, who would she pick?

The two people in the firewood room remained still and unconscious; footsteps could be heard slowly approaching the room. Di Yun's ears could hear the faint sounds of water dripping, drops of ice cold water falling on his face. He began to feel pain, followed by a feeling of intense cold, but he did not have any strength left in his body. Soon, he fell unconscious.

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As soon as Di Yun regained consciousness, he channelled strength on his right arm and immediately said, "I will strangle you! I will strangle you!" but he was not holding onto anything. He felt his body shook as if he was moving. He opened his eyes and saw complete darkness. He felt drops of water falling on his face, hands, and body. It turns out that it was raining.



His body was still in motion, his chest felt congested and he wanted to throw up. Suddenly, there was a boat that rowed beside him. There was a sail on the boat, so he knew for sure that it had to be a boat. He felt extremely strange: why would there be a boat beside him?

He wanted to stand up and take a good look at his surroundings, but his whole body felt weak and he was unable to move a muscle. He was lying down, facing upwards looking at the sky. He saw from the corner of his eye that there were black clouds adrift; he was no longer in the firewood room. All of a sudden, a thought came to his mind: "Where is Brother Ding?" As soon as he thought of Ding Dian, his body regained a bit of energy. His hands pushed against the ground as he got up. It turns out he was on a small boat. The small boat was at the river bank slowly floating to the heart of the river. It was night time and the sky was covered in darkness. He gave a glance at the left and right sides of the boat, but his view was pitch-black, he could not see anything at all. He felt a sense of urgency and shouted: "Brother! Brother Ding!" He knew that Ding Dian was already dead, but he could not afford to lose his body. All of a sudden, his left leg kicked on something soft. He lowered his head to take a look, and became excited. "Brother Ding, there you are!" He opened wide both arms and hugged him. Ding Dian's body was at the side of the ship, right on the side of his leg.

Di Yun felt so weak that he could barely breathe; he did not even have enough energy to think clearly. He felt his throat was very dry, so he opened his mouth wide and let the raindrops drip to his tongue. He felt very dizzy and half asleep. With both arms he hugged Ding Dian's body and lied there until day. The rain poured throughout the night.

The brightness of morning daylight shone on his body, and he suddenly noticed that on his thigh was wrapped around by a long cloth strip. As he became more conscious, he realized this cloth strip was used to bandage his wounds. He then noticed that his arms and shoulders were also bandaged by cloths, and he could smell the faint scent of medicine under the bandages. Last night's rainfall caused his bandages to become moist, but he was no longer bleeding from his wounds.

"Who was the one who bandaged me? Had I not been bandaged, even if no one went after me, I would have certainly died of excessive blood loss." In that moment he felt a burst of loneliness and suffering that he could not describe. "In this world, who still cares for me and is willing to help me? Brother Ding is already dead, who else would want me alive in this world? Who would trouble themselves to help bandage me?"

He looked closely and saw that the bandages in his body were not applied neatly, it seemed as if the person who bandaged him was in a great rush. However, the bandages were not made of rough material, it was in fact made of high-grade satin cloth. On the side of the ribbons appeared an exquisite decorative border, and on the other side appeared a torn cloth, it was ripped from someone's garment. It appeared to belong to a female.

Could it be his martial sister? His heart began to pound quickly, causing the injuries on his chest to warm up a little. From the corner of his mouth appeared an experience of coldness and self-mockery. He said: "She told her husband to come and kill me, why would she tend to my injuries? If it was not her that disclosed that I was hiding in the firewood room, how would Wan Gui know where to find me?"

However, he was currently on a small boat floating along the current. He had no idea how far away he was from Jiangling now. In any case, at the moment he was not in any danger and would not be harmed by the men from Ling Prefecture.

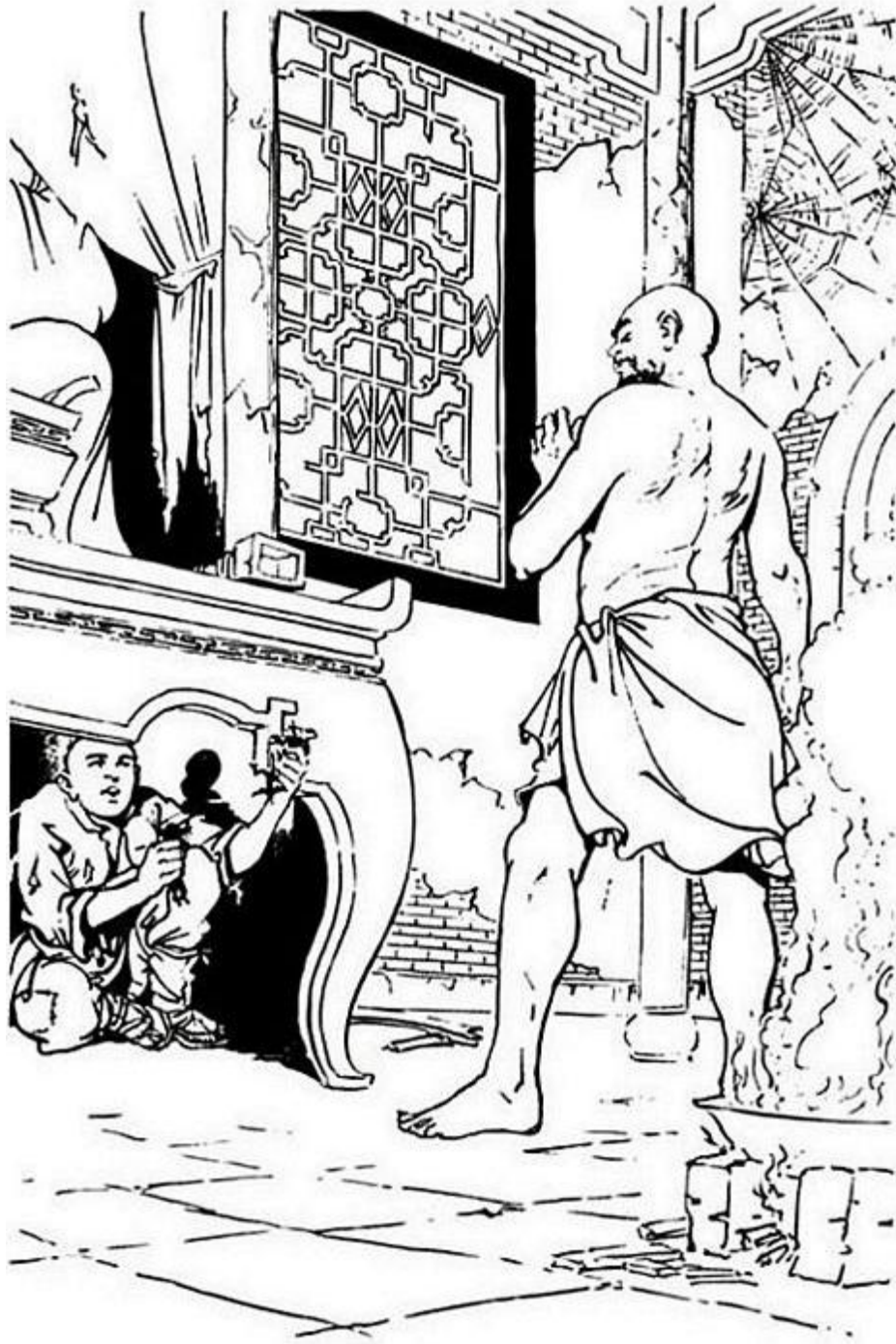
“Who was the one that bandaged my wounds? Who put me on the boat? This person even brought Brother Ding with me?” He no longer cared for his own well-being, but for this person to bring Ding Dian’s body together with him, he could not help but feel a sense of deep gratitude in his heart. He began to ponder deeply about the identity of this person, but he ended up having a headache, he no longer had any clue what was happening.

He tried his hardest to recall last night’s events. He remembered Wan Gui attacking Ding Dian’s body, and then he lunged himself at Wan Gui trying to strangle him with his arms. But he could not remember anything after that. The events afterwards felt like complete emptiness in his mind. He turned his head to the side and his forehead bumped into a very hard item. It was a bundle wrapped in light cloth. He became excited, as he felt that inside the bundle he could possibly find some clues. He struggled as he unwrapped the bundle with both hands. What he saw inside was five or six silver coins, and four pieces of woman’s jewellery consisting of a pearl flower, a gold bracelet, a gold necklace, and a precious gem ring. Besides that, there was a gold lock slice that children would often wear around their neck; the gold chain in the lock was hastily pulled off by someone. The part where the chain broke off hooked on the fragment of a small piece of cloth. Evidently, it was pulled from a little child’s neck and ripped off, as if this person’s possessions were robbed by a thief. On the gold lock slice engraved the four words “Virtuous Appearance, Double Luxuriance”. Di Yun was not very well educated. Even though he could read those four characters, he could not understand the meaning behind them. He thought: “Could it be the name of the child? Her daughter’s name is not ‘Virtuous Appearance’, nor is it ‘Double Luxuriance’. It is ‘Water Spinach’!”

He fiddled around with these five pieces of jewellery, and ended up being even more confused now than he was before he opened the bundle. He thought: “These coins and jewelleries were naturally given to me by the one who saved me, so that when I arrive at shore, I will have enough money to buy food. However, who was the one who gave it to me? These jewelleries do not belong to my martial sister, I have never seen her wear it before.”

In the vast ocean of water was that small boat drifting slowly ashore. In the days on the boat, Di Yun constantly pondered: “Who was the one who tended my wounds? Who was the one who gave me these silver coins and jewelleries?”

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup



*Di Yun was afraid that the monk would not eat a dead mouse, so he quickly replied: "Of course it is alive, it is still moving, only that I strangled it half to death." Then he reached and grabbed the two mice beneath the altar and showed it to him.*

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

The topography of Jiangling was that of flatness; the Yangtze River was meandering and circuitous between Hunan and Hubei. With the expansive flow of water in the east, the small boat slowly flowed along the current toward its destination. Di Yun gazed at the horizon of both coasts and saw that he was slowly passing through small towns and villages. There were boats and sails passing by him in opposite directions. When people on the other boats saw his bloody and dirty face, they felt both curious and astounded.

By the time it was close to nightfall, Di Yun had regained some of his strength. At the same time, his stomach was growling of hunger. He got up and picked up one of the paddles on the boat and slowly steered his boat towards the northern shore, intending to buy some food at a local restaurant. To his surprise, the area was quite desolate and there was no one to be found. The boat followed the stream and made a turn. He saw that under some willow trees were three fisherman boats. There was smoke coming out from these boats. As he paddled his small boat towards these three fisherman boats, he could hear the squeaking sounds of pans frying fishes, the fragrant smell rushing toward his direction.

He rowed his boat forward and approached the old fisherman. "Old fisherman, would you be kind enough to sell me a fish to eat?"

The fisherman saw that Di Yun's appearance was frightening and gory and became afraid. Originally, the fisherman was not willing to sell his fish, but he also did not dare to deny this request, and replied: "Yes! Yes!" He fetched a mackerel that he had just fried and put it on a bowl, then delivered it over to Di Yun's boat.

Di Yun said: "If you have a bowl of white rice, I would also like to buy it."

The fisherman replied: "Of course!" and brought a large pot of brown rice. The rice was mixed with a large portion of a potato and some sorghum.

Di Yun ate the rice heartily and consumed the entire bowl. As he was about to open his mouth to request for more, he heard the sound of a hoarse voice coming from the shore, shouting: "Fisherman! If you have large fish then bring some over!" Di Yun turned his head to look at the speaker. He saw a very tall and skinny monk; his two eyes were large and shined brightly. Di Yun instantly became startled, as he recognized that this was one of the five monks who fought with Ding Dian back in prison many nights ago. After some thought, Di Yun recalled that Ding Dian said this person's name was Bao Xiang. That night, Ding Dian managed to kill two of the monks while critically wounding two others, and the last who escaped was Bao Xiang.

Di Yun did not dare to give this man another glance. Ding Dian told him that the martial arts of this man was very high, and further told him that should he ever encounter this man, he should exercise extreme caution. If Bao Xiang should see Ding Dian's corpse, then he would be in deep trouble. With both hands he continued to eat heartily at his rice. Although he was not one to be afraid of death, he could not prevent his heart from pounding fast and his arms trembling. He thought: "Don't tremble! Don't tremble! I can't expose my identity!" But the more he wanted to remain calm, the harder it was to restrain himself.

He heard the fisherman reply: "I have sold all the fish I caught today, there is no more fish."

Bao Xiang angrily said: "Who said there is no fish? I am starving! Hurry and give me some fish! Even if there are no large fishes, the small ones will do."

The fisherman replied: "There is really no more fish! You have silver, if I had fish to sell why would I not sell it?" As he said this, he flipped over the basket of fish and exposed its empty contents, the bottom of the basket facing the sky.

Bao Xiang was extremely hungry. When he saw that beside Di Yun was a large fish that was only half-eaten, he shouted: "You, over there! Do you have any fish?"

Di Yun was startled as he heard this man was speaking to him. He was afraid that if he replied he would be recognized, so he did not say a word. Instead, he lifted his paddle and pushed hard on the tree roots on the shore. The small boat began to flow down the stream.

Bao Xiang was furious. "You bastard! I asked you if you have any fish, and you run away?"

When Di Yun heard his angry tone, he became even more scared. He began to row even faster, his boat approaching the heart of the river. Bao Xiang picked up a piece of rock from the shore and threw it at Di Yun. Di Yun saw the rock approaching him and bent over. The strong and swift noise of the wind made the rock fly over his head, and fell into the river, causing splashes of water to fly up the air.

Bao Xiang saw that when this man dodged the rock his movements were quite agile, definitely a person with some martial arts background. He became even more suspicious and said: "Damn it! You better row back now, or else I will take your life!"

Di Yun ignored his warning and continued to paddle his boat. Bao Xiang picked up a rock with his right hand and threw it, then followed by picking up another rock with his left hand and threw that too. Di Yun's hands were paddling the boat, but his attention was completely concentrated on the path of the rocks. He managed to dodge the first rock; the second rock approached at a low altitude at the same level as the hull of the ship and at once hit the ship at its bottom. It was only a few inches apart, all he could see was a dark object flying past him at rapid speed, the wind it emitted scraped his nose and caused pain on his cheek. As soon as he got back up, the third rock approached him, and with a loud clap, it hit the bow of the boat. Immediately, a piece of wood fell off the boat.

Bao Xiang watched as Di Yun dodged all his rocks with agility while the small boat was following the current, drifting further and further away. Immediately, he picked up two more chunks of rock and threw it at the boat. Had he aimed for the boat to begin with, such a small boat would most certainly sink immediately. But at this point the distance was much too great, although the two rocks hit the boat in succession, by the time it made contact most of the power was already lost, hence it only managed to shatter a small fragment of the boat and its railing.

Bao Xiang realized that he could no longer prevent this man from escaping, so he cursed and threw a fit of rage. From afar he could see the wind of the river carrying the boat, causing Di Yun's hair and facial hair to flutter in the wind. Suddenly he recalled: "This person looks like the prisoner that I once saw. Ding Dian escaped from the prison in Jingzhou prefecture, this news was already abuzz for a while in the realm. It is likely that from this man, I could find clues to the whereabouts of Ding Dian." As he thought up to this point, he had voracious desire to follow. In a fit of rage he yelled: "Fisherman! Fisherman! Quickly row me over to catch that man."

However, when the fisherman of the three boats under the willow tree saw him assailing the other man with rocks in such a vicious manner, he had long untied the mooring rope and left with his boat following the current.

Bao Xiang shouted repeatedly in an attempt to call the fisherman back to pick him up. However, with such vicious voice and mannerism, who would come back for him? In a fit of rage, he picked up several chunks of rock and threw it at one of the fisherman. One of the rocks hit the fisherman square on the head. The fisherman's brains splattered instantly and he fell into the river. The rest of the fishermen were scared out of their wits and began paddling away as fast as they could.

Bao Xiang followed the shore and started sprinting in great haste. He was going at a faster pace than Di Yun's boat. Bao Xiang continued chasing at the north bank of the Yangtze River while Di Yun continued paddling his boat towards the south bank. Although Bao Xiang managed to overtake him, the distance between him and the small boat was steadily increasing. Di Yun thought: "If he manages to find a boat by the shore and starts paddling towards me, there is no way I can escape his wrath." In a moment of desperation, he hoped: "Brother Ding, Brother Ding, if you are still here in spirit, please let it be that this evil monk cannot find a boat."

There were many boats in the Yangtze River travelling in both directions, but fortunately within several kilometers there were no boats heading towards the north bank. With all the strength in his body, Di Yun finally managed to row his boat to the south bank. Even though the surface of the river in this section was not wide, the trees served as good cover, and there was no hope for Bao Xiang to catch him now. Thereupon he decided to carry the bundle around his bosom, and carried Ding Dian's body with his arms, intending to travel on foot. Suddenly, he remembered something. He turned around and kicked the boat towards the heart of the river. The intention was that if Bao Xiang was to see the ship, he would think that Di Yun was still in it and make chase.

He continuously ran towards the southern direction, not knowing where he was going. He only wanted to be as far away from the riverside as possible. After running for several kilometers, he could not help but utter a breath of stress. However, he saw a vast expanse of whiteness the color of water. The river was in front of him. It turns out that at this point, the path of the Yangtze River changes to the southern direction.

He quickly turned around and saw on his right hand side was a small abandoned temple. Immediately, he carried Ding Dian towards the direction of the temple. By the time he reached the entrance, he felt his knees were so numb that he could no longer move. He fell on the ground. He was already weakened before from sustaining numerous injuries, and now he even had to paddle a long distance to reach shore, he truly had no more energy left in his body. He tried to get up twice but to no avail. He could only lie down on the ground and breathe slowly. He saw that the sky was slowly getting dark and felt a bit comforted. He thought: "I only have to wait until night time, then Bao Xiang won't be able to find us." Although Ding Dian was already dead, in his heart, he still treated him as his dearest friend.

He lied down outside the abandoned temple for about an hour before he managed to recover enough strength to lift himself up. He carried Ding Dian's body and walked into the temple. What he saw was a temple with a petty local deity who appeared short and trifling, its appearance somewhat comical. Di Yun was injured to the point that upon seeing this image of a deity, he revered happily and respectfully knelt before it, giving the statue several kowtows to make himself feel better. He

sat in front of the statue and blankly looked at Ding Dian. The sky was getting darker and he gradually felt more safe and secure. He lied down beside Ding Dian's body, just like what he used to do for the past several years back in their prison cell.

Before the middle of the night, it suddenly started to rain. The sound of rain and drips of water could be heard. Sometimes the rain was pouring while other times it felt gentle. Di Yun began to feel very cold, so he wanted to huddle together beside Ding Dian, when all of a sudden, he made contact with Ding Dian's cold and lifeless skin. Then he remembered that Brother Ding was already dead, and would never have the chance to speak with him again. As he had this thought, he felt misery in his heart and tears began to drip from his eyes.

Suddenly, amidst the sound of the rain, the sound of footsteps could be heard travelling towards the direction of the temple. This person was trampling over mud but was approaching at a rapid rate. Di Yun became startled as he heard the sound of this man approaching closer and closer. He quickly concealed Ding Dian's body under the altar, while he hid himself behind the statue.

As the sound of footsteps got closer, Di Yun's heart was beating faster. Suddenly he heard the sound of the temple door being kicked open, followed by someone cursing: "Your mother! Who knows where this old thief went, and now it is raining, causing your father to be wet all over."

The sound of the voice was like Bao Xiang. It was already inappropriate for a monk to curse "your mother" but he furthered called himself "your father" which was even more preposterous. Although Di Yun did not know much about the outside world, throughout the several years in prison he had heard many stories from Ding Dian's adventures in the realm. He was no longer the clueless bumpkin he was back in the countryside. He thought: "Although this Bao Xiang is dressed like a monk, he eats meat and kills people without hesitation. He is most likely an extremely violent culprit in disguise."

He continued to listen as Bao Xiang uttered more and more phrases of profanity, cursing and prancing around for a while. After some time, he sat in front of the altar. Then rustling sounds were heard. Di Yun could make out the monk was undressing all of his wet clothes and hanging it to dry in the corner. The man leaned beside the altar and began to fall asleep. Soon after, the sound of snoring could be heard as the man ventured into a deep sleep.

Di Yun wondered: "This vicious monk undressed all his clothing completely, and now he's sleeping in front of the deity like this, has he not sinned?" He thought: "I could take this opportunity to throw a large rock to kill him, lest I be in trouble the next day." However, he was not the type of person who could casually kill, and he also knew that the martial arts of Bao Xiang exceeded himself ten times over. Should he fail to kill him in one hit and give him the opportunity to fight back, he was sure to be doomed.

At this point he thought that he should escape through the rear doors since Bao Xiang would likely not notice. However, Ding Dian's corpse was hidden under the altar; should he try to take the body with him, he would definitely be discovered. He heard the continuous dripping of rainfall falling on the temple, and came up with a plan: should the rain stop tomorrow, then Bao Xiang would leave. However, the sound of rain he heard was not one that would easily stop. Should the rain not stop tomorrow, and should Bao Xiang not leave, he would likely begin to search around, then he is certainly going to find Ding Dian's body. Since this is the case, he could do nothing but pray for good

fortune. “Hopefully the rain will stop when the sky turns bright. Since the monk wants to chase after me, he’s likely to leave the temple.”

Suddenly, he thought of something else: “When he came in, he yelled that he did not know where the ‘old thief’ went. I am not that old, why would he call me an ‘old thief’? Could it be the case that he is actually looking for an elder?” He thought more about it, then came to a realization. “Ah, of course. My hair is long and my facial hair covers my face, I have not shaven it for several years. Of course people are likely to mistake me for an old man. He called me an ‘old thief’... hmm... he called me an ‘old thief!’” As he thought up to this point, he touched the messy facial hair on his cheeks.

Suddenly he heard a bang, as Bao Xiang turned his body over. Amidst his dreams he accidentally kicked under the altar, exactly the location where Ding Dian was hidden. He felt that the circumstances have changed, and immediately woke up in fear that someone was ambushing him under the altar. In the darkness he could not tell how many people were ambushing him. He picked up his blade and slashed around five or six times in all directions so that his enemies dared not get too close. He yelled: “Who is it? Your mother! Thief bastard!” He cursed several times but did not get any response. He held his breath and listened closely, but no sounds could be heard.

In the darkness, Bao Xiang slashed in all directions another 15 or 16 times. It was the stance of ‘The Eight Directions of Night Battle’. He kicked with his leg and with a loud “peng” the altar fell over. He slashed away with his blade and with a faint crack, the sound of bones being shattered could be heard. He had slashed into Ding Dian’s body.

Di Yun heard everything very clearly, Bao Xiang indeed slashed Ding Dian. Although Ding Dian was already dead and cannot feel the pain, in Di Yun’s heart, he still treated him as his closest friend and brother, so this slash was as painful as if he was the one being slashed. He immediately wanted to rush out to fight a battle to the death with the culprit, but in the five years in prison, he had slowly evolved from the hot-headed and crass personality of his youth. He was now a youth who would think things through before he acted. He thought: “If I rush out now to fight him, I will only die and nothing good will come out of that. If I cannot fulfill Brother Ding’s wish of being buried together with Lady Ling, how can I ever seek his forgiveness?”

Bao Xiang hacked again at Ding Dian’s corpse and there was no more noise after that. In the darkness, he was hardly aware of his surroundings. The match that he brought with him had long been moistened by the heavy rain, so there was no way for him to light up a fire. He slowly retreated and backed up a few steps, his back against the wall, for the fear that he may be ambushed from behind, and then paid close attention for any noise.

At this point a wall stood in the way of these two people, and besides the sound of the drizzle, nothing else could be heard.

Di Yun knew that if he so much as breathed too heavily, he would lose his life immediately. He had to micromanage his breathing, taking slow breaths in and out. In his mind he thought: “After another two hours or so, the sun will rise. When the monk sees Ding Dian’s body, I will be in serious trouble. What can I do?”

He was not an intelligent person to begin with, and now for him to come up with a plan to protect Ding Dian’s body from Bao Xiang proved to be an obstacle too great to be overcome. He thought long and hard, but he did not have the slightest idea of a plan. As he felt rushed, he repented and



redressed at his own errors and said: "Di Yun... oh Di Yun, you idiot. Of course you can't come up with a plan. If Brother Ding was still alive, he would surely know what to do." Under much stress, he began pulling at his hair, and using a bit of strength, six or seven strands fell off.

All of a sudden, he had an idea in his mind. "The vicious monk calls me an 'old thief'. He saw that I had a face full of facial hair so he thought I was an old person. If I shave off my facial hair completely, then he may not be able to recognize me. The only problem is that there is no razor nearby, how am I supposed to shave? Hmph, I'm not even afraid of death, would I be afraid of a little pain? I'll just use my hands to pull it off, that's what I'll do."

As he thought up to this point, he began to pull at his facial hair, and it started falling off slowly. But he was afraid that he may make noise and thought: "Even if the vicious monk will not recognize me, at most he will not kill me. But what will stop him from harming Brother Ding? Meh, one step at a time. For now I will keep myself alive, then I can get near the vicious monk, and find a way to kill him when he least expects it."

After he pulled out about half of his hair, he had another thought: "Even if I do not have any facial hair, I still have a head full of long hair which may give away my identity. The vicious monk came chasing me from the Yangtze River, so naturally he would recognize my long hair quite clearly." As he said this, he decided to go all the way, and picked on two strands of hair with one of his hands and pulled.

Although it did not hurt much to pull out his facial hair, to pull out his long hair cleanly definitely required a high tolerance of pain. As he continued to pull, he thought: "Pulling my hair out is no big deal. For Brother Ding, even if I had to cut my own hand off, I would not so much as crease my eyebrows." He thought more: "This is such a stupid idea. I bet Ding Dian's spirit is laughing at me right now. But... but... he cannot come back to tell me of a better plan."

He heard the sound of Bao Xiang falling asleep again. But as he was afraid that the vicious monk would hear the sound of his breathing, he pulled out a bunch of hair and walked forward one step extremely slowly. It took him almost an hour to retreat all the way back to the well. And after some more time, he slowly made his way to the rear exit of the temple, with the rain dripping on his face, he began to breathe more easily.

As he was now outside the temple, he was no longer afraid of being discovered by Bao Xiang, so naturally it was much easier for him to pull out his hair. Eventually, he managed to pull out all his facial hair and the hair on his head completely. The excruciating pain he felt on his head and chin was unbearable, something he had never experienced before. But upon thinking of how he lost his fingers to his enemy, and how his scapula was pierced, what does it really matter? Full of desires for revenge, he no longer cared about pain. He buried all his hair under the mud for fear that Bao Xiang would get suspicious. He felt his own scalp and chin, not only was he no longer an "old thief", he was now a "bald thief". Under grief and indignation, he could not help but laugh, and thought: "I must be a mess, my scalp and chin most likely red and bleeding, so I should wash it out for fear of revealing any marks." As he said this he lifted his head up to let the rain drip on his face.

He thought again: "Although I do not have any marks on my face, the vicious monk may still recognize my clothes and that would be troublesome. But there is no clothes for me to change into. I will just copy the vicious monk and remove all my clothes, how about that?" As he said this he removed all of his outer layers. He kept the silkworm vest on him and it became his undergarment.

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

But as he had no pants to wear, he tore off a portion of his coat and wrapped it around his waist. But he was also afraid that Bao Xiang would recognize the silkworm vest, so he rolled around the mud to cover his entire body.

At this point, even if Ding Dian were to come back to life, he would not be able to recognize him right away. Di Yun proceeded towards under a large tree, and with his fingers dug a hole to hide his bundle of clothes. He thought: "If by chance I manage to escape the wrath of the evil monk, and further ensure that Brother Ding rests in peace, I will certainly return the favour of the one who helped me bandage my wounds and gave me silver and jewelleryes. Who is this person?"

The sky was slowly getting bright as morning approached. Di Yun secretly went south, then westward for about a li. At the end of his travel the sky was already fully bright. He saw that the rain had yet to cease and presumed that Bao Xiang would not leave the temple. He tried to look for a weapon, but where can he find one amidst the wilderness? He only had a sharp stone slab hidden around his waist area, thinking that should he be able to slash this on the monk's vital areas it would be enough to take his life. The best case scenario would be that the evil monk has already left the temple, which would be a blessing.

When he looked at his own reflection in the water, he saw a very strange look and could not help but chuckle a bit. But at the same time, he felt a small hint of sadness. In his heart he still longed for Ding Dian. He could not find a suitable weapon so he decided to head east to the temple. He thought: "I could pretend to be a lunatic; a rascal from the local area." As he got closer to the temple, he released his larynx and sang loudly a folk song:

*"To the sister in the mountain, listen to me sing,  
If you marry, do not marry a rich man,  
Rich people have a bad conscience!  
Marry me, the bald and dysenteric A'San!"*

Back in his hometown in Hunan, he used to sing this song by the lakeside and farming area. From the creek to the mountain, with Qi Fang he did not know how many thousands of these songs they sang together. By the social customs of Hunan countryside, these folk songs were often seasonal and improvised, singing whatever fits the moment; it often rhymed and was superficial. These songs were not a big difference from regular day-to-day dialect. As he sang this song, he could not help but feel sour in his heart. Since he was separated with Qi Fang, it had been five years since he last uttered a folk song. At this moment the situation at hand was extremely awkward, for he was singing not for his beautiful martial sister, but a stark naked and vicious monk.

As he further approached the temple, he adjusted his larynx to a more feminine voice and sang again:

*"The bald and dysenteric A'San has fragrance,  
You wish to marry me, lovable and pretty as a flower?  
Would I covet your baldness and lack of need for a comb?  
Would I covet..."*

The next line of "would I covet" was not fully sang when Bao Xiang suddenly rushed out from the local temple. He wrapped his upper garment around his waist area and headed outside to see who it was. He only saw Di Yun bald and singing folk songs without a care, and thought that he was

actually a bald and dysenteric man. The lyrics to his song was full of self-mockery, so Bao Xiang could not help but laugh and said: "Hey, bald man, come over here!"

Di Yun continued to sing:

*"What does the elder monk request me for?  
Do you wish for gold and silver?  
The bald and dysenteric A'San is lucky,  
The elder monk must treat me to a roast pig."*

He sang all the while heading towards Bao Xiang's direction, although he was exerting himself to produce a calm and composed look, his heart was actually beating at an alarming rate and his face changed colors. Bao Xiang noticed this and commented: "Bald and dysenteric A'San, if you can find something for me to eat, I will reward you greatly. Are there any fat pigs?"

Di Yun shook his head and sang:

*"In the mountain range of the wild there are no pigs..."*

Bao Xiang scolded: "Speak properly, do not sing anymore."

Di Yun thrust his lips and tried to produce a vigorous accent and said: "The bald and dysenteric A'San is used to singing folk songs, in regular speech he is not as fluent. Elder monk, a half a kilometer away lies the Buba Village, and after that the Buba Shop. Within five kilometres there is no sight of anyone. Not even to mention eating a pig, even eating some white rice and plain vegetables could be difficult. If you travel westward for 15 li there is a large town. You can eat chicken and fish and drink wine, whatever you want to eat you can find, why don't you go there?" He knew that he did not have the power to kill Bao Xiang to get revenge for him slashing at Ding Dian's body, but he hoped that the monk would listen to his nonsense and head westward so he has time to take away Ding Dian's body. However, the heavy rain did not cease and dripped heavily on both of them.

Bao Xiang said: "You will find me something to eat. It is best if you can find meat and wine. If not, then you can slaughter a chicken or a duck and that will work too."

Di Yun could only think about Ding Dian, so he reluctantly agreed. He went inside the temple and saw that Ding Dian's body had been pulled out from beneath the altar and his clothes were ripped apart. His body was obviously searched thoroughly by Bao Xiang. Di Yun was full of hatred inside and could not hold it anymore, he said: "There... there is a dead person inside... did... did you kill him?"

His face changed color and Bao Xiang thought that he was afraid of the dead body and laughed maliciously. "I did not kill him. Come and take a look, do you recognize him?"

Di Yun was taken aback and felt his own guilty conscience. If it was the case that the monk has already seen through his disguise, he would not be able to protect Ding Dian and would have no choice but to run away. He came to a decision and said: "This person looks very strange, he is not from the local area."

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

Bao Xiang laughed: "Of course he is not from your village." Then he continued in a much more serious tone: "Go find me something to eat! If you don't listen to me, are you not afraid my holy self will not take your pathetic life?"

Di Yun saw that Ding Dian's body was not in trouble for the moment so he felt relaxed, so he replied, "Yes!" and turned away to leave. He thought: "All I have to do is hide from him for half a day. Eventually he will starve and have no choice but to look for food himself. It is unlikely that he will take Brother Ding along with him, as he has already searched his body thoroughly and could not find anything, he should naturally have given up."

But before he even walked two steps, Bao Xiang yelled: "Stop! Where are you going?"

Di Yun replied: "I am going to find you something to eat."

Bao Xiang said: "Very good! How long will it take you?"

Di Yun replied: "It will only take a moment."

Bao Xiang said: "Then go!"

Di Yun turned his head to take another look at Ding Dian before leaving. Suddenly, he felt a gust of wind approaching from behind, and with two claps, both cheeks were slapped. Fortunately, Bao Xiang thought that he was a countryman who did not know any martial arts, so there was not much force in these strikes. It was further fortunate that Bao Xiang's movements were surprisingly fast and hit him right away, for as Di Yun was not so bright: if he felt that he was being attacked from behind, his natural instinct would be to dodge and that would give away the fact that he knew martial arts.

Di Yun was startled and said: "You... you..." He thought: "He must have seen through my disguise. I have no choice but to give it all I've got."

But he heard Bao Xiang say: "How much money do you have on you? Take it all out for me to see!"

Di Yun replied: "I... I..."

Bao Xiang scolded: "Your entire body is empty! You are a poor man; with your pathetic look, how are you supposed to get me anything to eat? Hmph, you claim to want to get me food, but is it not just a ploy to escape?"

When Di Yun heard his reply, he felt comfort. He thought: "So he only exposed the fact that I was lying about getting him food. That is not a big deal."

Bao Xiang continued: "Your bald head said that within ten li there is not a person in sight, so how can you get me food and come back in just a moment? Aren't you clearly deceiving me? Hmph, you better speak the truth, what do you want?"

Di Yun stammered a reply. "I... I was afraid of elder monk and wanted to go home."

Bao Xiang laughed heartily and pounded his chest full of long dark hair. He said: "What are you afraid of? Afraid that I'll eat you?" As soon as he said the word "eat", his stomach growled and he felt even more hunger. He had already searched the temple thoroughly and knew there was no food around. The few words he said earlier: "What are you afraid of? Afraid that I'll eat you?" came back to him, and his eyes filled with violence and stared intensely at Di Yun.

Di Yun felt all the hairs in his body straighten as he saw the look of the monk; he had already guessed the monk's intentions. Indeed, the monk was thinking: "The meat of a person does not taste bad at all, and a person's heart and liver tastes even better. In front of me is a person not much different from a pig, perhaps I could eat him alive?"

Di Yun felt consistent bitterness in his heart. "If he kills me it is no big deal. But from the evil monk's expression, he must want to cook me alive and that would be much too violent. I will fight to the very end." However, as soon as he fights back he would certainly be killed. And after he dies he would still be eaten, so is there really a difference? Di Yun saw as Bao Xiang's eyes were fierce and laughed maliciously as he slowly approached.

Di Yun could only watch as Bao Xiang moved forward. With every step his expression became more sinister and frightening. Di Yun backed away a few steps. Bao Xiang laughed: "You skinny man, you probably don't taste very good. That dead body has a much fuller build than you. Unfortunately, there is toxic in a corpse, so I cannot eat him. Oh well, even though I can't eat a fat pig, the skinny pig will have to do." He extended his arms to grab Di Yun by the shoulder.

Di Yun used his strength to struggle, but how could he? The anxiety and dreadfulness he felt in his heart was indescribable. After so many years of torture and pain, he had already forgotten his fear of death. But the thought of being eaten alive by this evil monk sent shivers down his spine.

Bao Xiang saw that Di Yun had no way to escape and thought that maybe he should tell him to boil the water first before killing him. Unfortunately, a person would not willingly kill himself and boil himself into a big bowl of red meat and hand himself over. He said: "There are two ways I could kill you and eat you. The first way is to cut off the flesh in your legs, then cut and slash all over your body so you will suffer immense pain. The second way is to kill you with a simple slash and cook you into a stew. Which method do you prefer?"

Di Yun bit his teeth and replied: "You... you want to kill me... you... you evil monk..." He wanted to curse at him, but was afraid that should he anger the monk that he would be tortured even more. Just as he was about to utter out his curse words, he swallowed it back in.

Bao Xiang laughed: "Correct, it is good that you know this. The more you listen to me, the easier you will die. The more you refuse, the more pain you will suffer. Hmph, bald and dysenteric A'San, I order you to find a cauldron in the kitchen and fill it with hot water."

Di Yun knew that it was used to cook himself, but he could not help but ask: "Why?"

Bao Xiang laughed: "You don't need to ask, just go!"

Di Yun said: "To boil water it is best to do it in the kitchen, if I take out the cauldron it is not as convenient."

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

Bao Xiang replied: “The kitchen is full of dust and spider webs, if my holiness goes in there I will definitely sneeze. If I don’t keep a close eye on you, you will find an opportunity to escape.”

Di Yun insisted: “Then I will not run away.”

Bao Xiang scolded: “You will do whatever I tell you to. Do you dare to disobey me?” As he said this he released his fist and punched Di Yun hard on the left cheek, then followed with a hard kick.

Di Yun fell on the floor, then suddenly he thought: “He is telling me to boil water, this is an opportunity. I just have to wait until the water boils, then I will splash the entire cauldron over his body. He is naked, would he not be burnt to death at once?” He kept this idea in his heart and did not feel any fear. He went into the kitchen and fetched a worn-out cauldron. He saw that the upper part of the cauldron was damaged and could only hold about half of its capacity, this half may not necessarily be enough to burn down the monk. But he thought even if it wasn’t good enough to kill him completely, to burn him half to death and leave him suffering is not a bad idea either.

He took the iron cauldron to the well in front of the temple and wiped away the leaves and rain water before filling the cauldron completely.

Bao Xiang complimented: “Very good! Very good! Bald and dysenteric A’San, I am really unwilling to part with you. You are very efficient in your work, you could help me make a good stew!”

Di Yun forced a bitter smile and replied: “Thank you for elder monk’s compliments.” Then he picked up seven or eight bricks and placed it beneath the cauldron. In this broken temple there were many broken legs of chairs and tables, Di Yun was anxious in engaging a fight to the death against Bao Xiang, so he rapidly collected the materials and placed it under the cauldron. However, to find a kindler was not an easy task. Di Yun opened up his hands and gave out an expression of having no alternative.

Bao Xiang asked: “What’s wrong? You don’t have a kindler? I remember there’s one on his body.” He pointed to Ding Dian’s corpse. Di Yun had already seen Ding Dian’s legs being cut up by Bao Xiang and it was a complete mess, he could already feel the grief rush out from his heart. When he stared back at the ferocious look of Bao Xiang, he only wished he could throw himself at him and bite him.

Bao Xiang resembled a cat that caught a mouse: he wanted to toy with the mouse before eating it, so he did not take notice to Di Yun’s anger and frustration. He sneered: “If you can find it then it is for the better. If you cannot make a fire, this monk is fine eating raw meat.”

Di Yun searched Ding Dian’s body and suddenly in his coat pocket he felt two pieces of hard material. One was a flint and the other was a fire knife. He thought: “When the two of us were back in prison, Brother Ding did not carry these two things with him, so where did he get it from?” He turned over the fire knife and saw a brand name on it that said “Jingzhou Old Quan’s Iron Shop” In the past, Di Yun had been to an iron shop with Ding Dian to remove the iron chains from their body; it was precisely the name of this shop. Di Yun held tightly to the knife and flint and thought: “Brother Ding has planned thoroughly. He took this knife and flint from the iron shop as a mean to assist me in my adventures in the realm. Alas, it had not even been used once and he has already passed away.” As he held on to the knife and flint, he could not help but become teary.

Bao Xiang thought that Di Yun was grieving because he knew that he would be dead not long after he built a fire. He laughed: "This monk's body is worth a thousand pounds of gold; you must have done good deeds in your previous life, for this life you can use my intestines as your coffin, and my belly as your tomb, you are truly most fortunate! Now quickly light the fire!"

Di Yun did not reply and found an extremely old piece of yellow fortune paper and placed it beside the knife and flint. As he started the fire it slowly began to burn the yellow paper, and the text that was originally covered by dust could now be seen. It was a negative phrase which said: "Beg for status and you shall not receive", "Your love life will be disastrous", "Your journeys will be detrimental", and "Your sicknesses will not be cured" and many other phrases. In a short time, the flame burnt away a good half of the paper. Di Yun thought: "My entire life is full of misfortune; I do not need a fortune paper to tell me this."

The water inside the cauldron slowly began to boil. Di Yun knew that the water would fully boil within the time it took to burn one incense stick<sup>1</sup>. He felt increasingly nervous as he stared at the pot of water then at Bao Xiang's stomach. He knew that the difference between life and death would be determined in the next few moments, and involuntarily his hands began to tremble. Finally, the water in the cauldron began to boil as it began to bubble and steam was rising out of the pot. Di Yun stood up straight, picked up the iron cauldron with both hands, and walked forward to splash the pot of boiled water at Bao Xiang.

However when Di Yun stood up, Bao Xiang already took notice, and with ten fingers extending outwards he grabbed Di Yun by the wrist and shouted: "What are you doing?" Di Yun did not want to make an excuse, and he used his strength to try and splash the water at Bao Xiang's direction. However, his wrist was holding the iron hoop on the cauldron and was grabbed by Bao Xiang, it would not budge any further.

If Bao Xiang wanted to splash the water at Di Yun's direction, all he needed to was simply use his arm strength and it would be done. However, if he were to waste half the bucket of water to burn this bald and dysenteric A'San to death, he would have to boil the water again himself and that would be too much of a hassle. He used strength in both his arms and forced downwards, placing the iron cauldron in its original spot, and yelled: "Let go!"

Di Yun could do nothing but drop the cauldron with both hands. Immediately, Bao Xiang kicked forward and with a loud "peng" kicked Di Yun straight away. He slammed head first into the altar. Bao Xiang thought: "This bald man's arm strength is not bad, I should be more careful." Then he said: "Your daddy I wants to kill you, you should be good and remove all your clothes so that your daddy does not have to put any effort."

Di Yun reached for the sharp stone slab that he hid around his waist intending to rush out and fight to the death against the monk, when suddenly beside one of the legs of the altar he saw two mice with their stomachs facing the sky, their bodies unable to move, half dead. Then all of a sudden across the darkness of his thoughts came a flash of white light, and he said: "I will catch a few mice for you to eat first, is that okay? The taste of mice is more fresh and pleasant than that of dog meat."

Bao Xiang replied: "What? Mice? Is it dead or alive?"

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<sup>1</sup> About 5 minutes.

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

Di Yun was afraid that the monk would not eat a dead mouse, so he quickly replied: "Of course it is alive, it is still moving, only that I strangled it half to death." Then he reached and grabbed the two mice beneath the altar and showed it to him.

Bao Xiang has eaten mice in the past and knew that its meat tasted not much different from that of thin pork. In front of him he saw two mice that were not big, but in this broken temple there was nothing else to eat, he muttered to himself and could not come to a decision.

Di Yun suggested: "Elder monk, I will skin the mouse for you and prepare a big bowl of soup, I promise it will taste good and be ready in no time."

Bao Xiang was a very lazy person by nature. For him to kill and wash and cut up the food, just the thought was enough to make him agitated. When he heard that Di Yun would voluntarily prepare mouse soup for him, it was in line with his original intentions, so he replied: "Two mice will not be enough for me to eat, you must go and catch some more."

Di Yun thought: "My martial arts abilities have been lost and my limbs cannot move readily, how can I catch a mouse?" But it was fortunate for him to find a way out of being eaten, so he could not let go of this opportunity, and immediately replied: "Elder monk, I will first prepare these two mice for you as an appetizer, then I will catch some more!"

Bao Xiang nodded his head: "This is not a bad idea. If I can eat until I'm full, I will spare your life, how about that?"

Di Yun crawled out from beneath the altar and said: "I need to borrow your knife for a moment, so I can cut off this mouse's head."

Bao Xiang did not take this bald man from the countryside seriously at all, so he pointed at his blade and said: "Go ahead!" Then he added: "If you have the guts, try and cut off your daddy's head!"

Di Yun originally had the intention of taking the blade then turning over to cut his head off, but his plan was already exposed, so he could not make any reckless moves. With two slashes he cut off the mouse's head and opened its belly, putting the intestines and other organs of the mouse to be washed by the rain water. Then he put it inside the cauldron.

Bao Xiang nodded his head several times. "Good, very good. You can actually make some decent mouse soup. Now go and catch me some more."

Di Yun replied, "Of course, I will go right now" and turned his body to walk towards the exit.

Bao Xiang said: "If you think about escaping, I will rip the flesh off your body piece by piece and eat you alive!"

Di Yun replied: "If I cannot catch a mouse then I will catch a frog. In the river there are plenty of fish and shrimp to eat. I will serve elder monk until he is completely full. If elder monk is so satisfied, why is there any need to eat me? The bald and dysenteric A'San has skin ulcers and scabies all over, if you eat me you will be sick for sure."



Bao Xiang said: "Hmph, do not let me wait until I become impatient. Hey, you cannot leave this temple, do you understand?"

Di Yun agreed at once and crawled around the floor, imitating the movements of trying to catch mice. Slowly he crawled his way out the back door until he could stand up straight. He looked in the east and westward direction in hopes of finding a place to hide. He looked outside the back door and saw on the left hand side there was a small pond. At once he ran to the pond as fast as he could, recklessly relying on a hopelessly optimistic forecast. He slowly sank into the pond and only his nose and mouth was above water so he could breathe. He further grabbed a pile of grass and stuck it in his nose.

Since he grew up by the riverside, naturally he was good at swimming. Unfortunately, he was much too far from the river, otherwise he could fall into the Yangtze River and follow the current, and Bao Xiang would have no way of catching him.

After a while, he heard Bao Xiang compliment: "Good soup! Mouse soup is indeed not bad. Too bad there are too few mice. Hey A'San, have you caught any mice yet?" He called out several times then followed by cursing several profanities. Di Yun's right ear was above the water so he could listen to Bao Xiang. All he heard was a mouthful of profanities and extremely vulgar expressions, he trampled on the floor and kicked the mud as he rushed outside.

He took a few strides before he reached the tip of the pond. Di Yun did not dare to reveal any part of himself; his entire body submerged under water. Fortunately, this pond was filled with green duckweed and various aquatic grasses, whoever was above water could not see him at all.

However, he could not breathe underwater. He held his breath until he could no longer hold it, then he had no choice but to slowly lift his head above the surface and take a breath. He only managed to take half a breath before he was caught by a large hand pulling him from behind. Bao Xiang scolded: "If I do not cut your bald head into seventeen or eighteen pieces, your daddy I will not be considered a person! How dare you try and escape!"

Di Yun flipped his hand to grab Bao Xiang's arm and tried to drag him down to the pond. Bao Xiang did not expect that Di Yun would dare to counterattack, so he slipped on the mud beside the pond and with a "plop" he fell into the pond.

Di Yun was excited at the turn of events, and exerted all his strength to push Bao Xiang underwater. However, the pond was too shallow and Bao Xiang was too tall and built, the water did not even go over his head. Once Bao Xiang's feet hit the bottom of the pond, he countered by turning his hand over and grabbed Di Yun's wrists, then with his left hand he put his head underwater. Di Yun had already put his life aside; even though he was underwater, he maintained his grip on Bao Xiang and would not let go at any cost. At that moment Bao Xiang could not immediately struggle himself free and cursed loudly. He was careless and accidentally swallowed a few mouthfuls of dirty water which fed his anger even further. He raised his fist and hit Di Yun hard on the back.

Di Yun felt the force of Bao Xiang's strike landing on his back. However, as his body was underwater, the power of this attack was greatly reduced and was less painful. However if he were to take another few of punches, he would definitely pass out. He had no way of retaliating, the only thing he could do was ram his head into Bao Xiang's chest.

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

They continued to struggle with each other when all of a sudden Bao Xiang screamed, “Aiyo!” and let go of his hold on Di Yun. The fist he raised remained in midair, not attacking its target and slowly drifted downwards. Then followed that his entire body became stiff and he fell underwater.

Di Yun felt exceedingly strange at the turn of events and struggled to pull himself back to surface. He only saw that Bao Xiang did not move at all, as if he was dead. As he was still in a panicked state, he did not dare to make contact with his body and only stood at the side of the pond and observed. He only saw Bao Xiang continue to sink until his entire body was at the bottom of the pond and did not move at all. After a while, it appeared that the monk was really dead. Di Yun was still not confident so he threw a few pieces of rock at his body. When he saw that the body did not move at all, he realized that he was not faking his death.

Di Yun made his way back to the surface and could not figure out how the evil monk died all of a sudden for no apparent reason. In his mind he had a glimmer of hope: “Is it possible that my abilities in the Heavenly Glow possess such formidable strength that even I don’t know about it? When I rammed my head hard against his chest, was that enough to take his life?” He tried to channel his energy but only felt the “Jushao Yangdan channel reached the “Five Li” acupoint on his thigh. No matter what it could not work, he also tried “Shoushao Yang Sanjiao” meridian and channelled it to the “Qing Leng Yuan” acupoint but it also clogged up. In fact, he felt even worse than when he first left prison; it must be because in the last several days he could not maintain focus and had to put aside his training. Evidently, to complete the training of the Heavenly Glow, he still has a very long distance to cover.”

He stood quietly at the side of the pond and stared blankly. He could not believe the events that had just occurred. But he saw the raindrops gradually fall into the pond causing ripples, with Bao Xiang’s body at the bottom of the pond with no signs of life.

He was dumbstruck for a while before he returned to the temple. He saw that the fire of the iron cauldron was already extinguished, on the side of the cauldron were two dead mice with their stomachs facing the ceiling, its ears and foot showing brief signs of movement. Di Yun thought: “So it turns out that Bao Xiang also caught two mice but did not have the fortune to experience it, and was consequently killed by me.” He saw inside the cauldron there was still some residue of mouse soup; it must have been left behind by Bao Xiang. Di Yun was very hungry too, so he lifted the iron cauldron and opened his mouth to drink the remaining of the mouse soup. All of a sudden, there was a very strong scent of strange fragrance.

He felt a bit stunned and supported the cauldron with both hands and withdrew it from his mouth. He pondered: “What is this pleasant smell? I have smelled this before, but cannot make out what it is.” He smelled the strange fragrance in the mouse soup again and immediately came to a conclusion. He exclaimed, “Good fortune!” and with both hands he threw the iron cauldron inside the well. As he turned around to look at Ding Dian’s body, he could hardly contain his tears. “Brother Ding, even after your death, you have saved your brother once again.”

During this matter of life and death, in a flash he finally realized the true cause of Bao Xiang’s demise.

The poison that Ding Dian contracted was that of the “Golden Ripple Flower”, and consequently his entire body was toxic. Bao Xiang used his blade to slash Ding Dian’s corpse and this same blade was used to kill the mice. The poison was smeared on the mice, hence when Bao Xiang drank the mouse

soup he also contracted this poison. During their struggle in the pond, Bao Xiang suddenly died of toxicity. The two mice in front of him right now also died as a result of drinking the poisonous mouse soup in the cauldron.

Di Yun thought: "If not for the essence of the Golden Ripple Flower containing such a strange and fragrant smell, and if I could not come to this realization quickly enough, I too would have drunk this poisonous soup." He also thought: "The first time I smelled the scent of the Golden Ripple Flower was back at Lady Ling's funeral hall, when Magistrate Ling smeared this poison on his daughter's coffin. Brother Ding has smelled and contracted this poison once in the past, how did he not realize this the second time? It must be that upon seeing Lady Ling's coffin, Brother Ding's mind was in a state of turmoil and he could not think at all."

In the past, Di Yun was completely disheartened and had given up on everything in life; he no longer wanted to live. But at this moment, he survived by the skin of his teeth, and he could not help but feel that it was indeed a fortunate occurrence. The sky was full of layer upon layers of dark clouds and pouring with rain, yet in his heart he felt a sense of radiance. He felt that at the very least he saved his own life, which could be considered an experience of boundless joy.

He took a moment to regain his composure, then carefully placed Ding Dian's body upright in the corner of the room. Then he went to fetch Bao Xiang's body from beneath the pond. He dug a hole in the ground and buried the body. When he returned to the temple, he saw Bao Xiang's garments were placed on the altar, and on top of that was a tarpaulin packet which contained about a dozen taels of silver.

His curiosity got the best of him and he opened the packet. Inside was another layer of oil paper. He unwrapped the oil paper and saw that a small yellow paper book was wrapped inside. The text written on the seal was curved and meandering, these characters did not look like actual characters, nor did they look like drawings. He could not make out what they were.

He turned the book over and opened it. On the first page was a drawing of a really thin and naked man with one finger pointing at the sky and another finger pointing on the ground. The appearance of this man was sly and awkward. On the side, text shaped like tadpoles were written in red and green. Di Yun looked at the drawing of the man and saw that he had a profound sight and a hooked nose, his forehead slightly curved. The appearance was somewhat odd and did not look like a figure from the mainland. In addition to this strangeness, there seemed to be some sort of attraction embedded in the drawing, as if one could not help but be swayed to look at it.

He turned to the second page. There was another drawing of a naked man just like before, but in a different position; his left foot was standing firm while his right foot was extended forward. The two hands were placed behind his back, his left hand touching his right ear while his right hand touched his left ear.

He continued turning the pages in this book. In each page was a drawing of the same naked man, his disposition becoming more and more bewildering. The position changes were limitless; sometimes his hands would push against the ground, while other times it would leap in midair. Even more, sometimes his entire body would be upside-down, with the top of his head on the ground, the lower half of his body gave birth to six imaginary limbs. In the latter half of the book, the man wielded a curved sabre.

He returned to the first page and paid close attention to the expression on the man's face. He saw that his tongue was faintly extended from the left corner of his mouth. At the same time, his right eye was opened wide while his left eye was closed; an extremely odd appearance. Di Yun became curious and tried to follow the expression of this man; also extending the tip of his tongue, his right eye was opened while his left eye was closed. As soon as he did this expression, he felt his face became very relaxed and comforting. He continued to look at the drawings, he could faintly see that in the man's body there were several strips of extremely mild grey threads drawn by various meridians in his body. Di Yun thought: "Of course. The reason that the man in this drawing did not wear any clothes was to express the meridians in his body."

During the time when Ding Dian taught him the Heavenly Glow in prison, he had once explained in rigorous detail the various directions a person's meridians can take. In order to learn the most profound internal energy techniques, this was the underlying concept. He already memorized this thoroughly, but at this moment when he looked at the drawing of the pathways of the meridians, he could not help but begin to channel his internal energy in accordance to the directions of the drawing.

He thought: "The direction that this meridian takes is exactly opposite from what Brother Ding taught me. I'm afraid this is incorrect." But he thought further, "I will try it anyway, what harm will it do me?" and at once he channelled his energy along the paths of the drawing. In a short moment, his entire body felt a sensation of relaxation and briskness that he could not describe.

When he practiced the Heavenly Glow, he had to concentrate his energy completely; it would move upwards only one inch or two inches at a time and was very challenging. Yet when he channelled his energy according to the drawing, in an instant his energy was flowing like the current of a river, he did not even need to exert the slightest bit of strength and his interior flowed naturally. He felt both startled and pleased: "How does my interior have such meridian pathways? Could it be that even Brother Ding doesn't know about it?" Then he thought: "This manual belonged to the evil monk, and the text and drawings written on it are extremely nefarious and strange, it is unlikely to be orthodox. I would be best not training with it anymore."

However, once his interior channels were in motion, he did not want to abruptly stop practicing. He thought: "Very well, I will only practice this once. Next time I will not practice it." Slowly he began to feel carefree and relaxed, the blood in his body felt warmer. After another while, he felt light as a feather, as if he just finished a full meal with alcohol. He could not help but start dancing around and then he began to utter faint humming sounds. His mind drew a blank and he fell unconscious. After that he did not know what happened.

After a long while, he finally regained consciousness. He slowly opened his eyes and the brightness of the sky made him slightly uncomfortable. It turns out that the rain had already stopped and the sun was shining at the direction of the temple. He jumped up at once and felt invigorated, as if his entire body was full of energy. He thought: "Is it possible that the techniques in this manual have some sort of benefit? No! No! I should just follow the methods that Brother Ding taught me. This manual is unorthodox; should I continue training with it, the effects may be irreversible." He grabbed the manual with the intent of ripping it apart, but thought about it some more and felt it was mysterious and was unwilling to part with it.

He tidied up his garments but saw they were already ragged and it was difficult to cover his body. He saw that Bao Xiang's monk garment and pants were still hung on top of the altar, so he decided

to wear those instead. But as he put on this evil monk's attire, he felt uncomfortable; he could barely move around in it. Furthermore, the trousers had 17 or 18 holes in it, he could not even hide his buttocks from plain view. He took the manual along with the dozen or so silver taels inside the packet, then he went to the tree where he hid the various jewelleries and silver and dug those out of the mud. He carried Ding Dian's body with him and left the temple.

After travelling for a kilometer or so, he saw a farmer approaching his direction. When the farmer saw that he was carrying a dead body with him, he immediately became startled and slipped on the mud. His entire body was covered with mud as he got up; he could barely maintain his balance as he struggled to run away.

Di Yun knew that if he were to continue travelling in this direction, he may cause many unnecessary incidents. But at this moment in time he could not come up with a good plan. Fortunately, this region was somewhat desolate and it would be unlikely for him to encounter anyone along the way. He continued to carry Ding Dian and thought: "Brother Ding, I cannot bear to part with you, I cannot part with you."

Then he heard the voice of seven or eight farmers singing folk songs as they carried a shovel on their back. Di Yun sprinted quickly and hid amidst the tall grass fields, waiting for the farmers to pass. He thought: "If I do not burn Ding Dian's body, I will never be able to fulfill his wish of being buried together with Lady Ling." He arrived at a trough in the mountain area and fetched for some dried sticks and firewood. He clenched his teeth and set a fire ablaze and burnt the sticks around Ding Dian's body.

As the tongue of the flame engulfed Ding Dian's hair and clothing, Di Yun felt as if the flame was burning his own skin and flesh. He threw himself on the ground and bit on the grass, his tears dripping into the grass and earth.

He carefully picked up Ding Dian's ashes and solemnly wrapped it around oil paper, then added another layer of tarpaulin. This oil paper and tarpaulin was exactly what Bao Xiang used to wrap the yellow manual. After he had carefully wrapped the paper around the ashes, he placed it by his waist, then scooped out a bit with his hands, causing the remaining ashes to fall in the pit. Then he covered up the ashes with mud and paid his respects.

He got back up and felt wondered what he should do next. The only close person he had left in this world was his teacher, so he suddenly thought: "I will return to Yuanling to find my teacher." teacher had wounded Wan Zhenshan and escaped, it was unlikely that he would return to his residence in Yuanling. It is likely that he created a new identity for himself and lived in a remote area. But besides returning to Yuanling to take a look, Di Yun could not think of anywhere else he wanted to go.

At once he followed the path down until he arrived at a village. He asked a local and it turns out that the name of this place was called Tashi Dock, a place in Jianli county in Hubei. This place could be considered to be within the territories of Hunan. The river banks were desolate. Di Yun made his way to Tashi Dock and took out some silver to buy food to eat.

When he left the restaurant, he heard some loud rackets in the distance. There were many people gathered and much hubbub. Then he heard loud shouts and clashes as if there was a battle going on. Di Yun became curious and went to see what was causing all the excitement. He saw in the middle

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

of the crowd of people there were seven or eight built men attacking an elderly man all at once. This old man wore green clothes and a cap while the built men were barefooted and wore short sleeves. On the side was a small basket of fish. They were obviously fish merchants.

Di Yun thought that it was just ordinary street fighting that wasn't worth spectating, so he was about to leave when suddenly the elderly man unleashed a flying kick that sent one of the built men flying, turning a few somersaults before landing on the basket of fish. It turns out that this old man knew some martial arts.

He became curious and wanted to figure out the reason behind this fight. He saw that the elderly man was single-handedly battling the majority, and at once he knocked out another three fish merchants. There were also a few fish merchants among the audience, but at this time none of them dared to step forward to do battle. All of a sudden a fish merchant yelled out: "The boss is here! The boss is here!" Di Yun turned and saw from the riverside approached two fish merchants in rapid speed. A third fish merchant followed close behind. Di Yun observed their movements and saw that their steps were calm and steady and he could tell at once that they knew martial arts.

The three of them approached the scene. The one in front was a man around 40 years of age with a candle-like complexion. He gave a glance at the fish merchant on the floor and asked: "Who are you? Whose axe are you carrying to dare to pick fights with people from Taishi Dock?" He asked these questions directed to the old man, but he did not even look in his direction.

The old man replied: "I only want to buy fish with money, how am I picking on anyone?"

The fish boss asked the fish merchant on the side: "Why did you start fighting?"

The fish merchant said: "This elderly man wants to buy our pair of gold carps. I told him that gold carps are difficult to find and it is used for boss to brew medicine. This elder insisted on buying the carp at any cost and we would not allow it, so he resorted to stealing."

The fish boss turned around and gave a few looks to size up the elder. "Your friend has been hit by the Blue Sand Palm?"

As soon as the old man heard this, he changed expression. "I do not know what of Red Sand Palm or Blue Sand Palm. The master of my family only wants to eat carp and drink wine and ordered me to buy carp for him. In this world there is no fish that is not for sale, what kind of logic are they using to not sell the carp to me?"

The fish boss sneered: "Is there any reason to lie in front of your face? May I ask what your honourable name is? If you are a good person, not only are we willing to spare these two gold carps, but I will personally give you the 'Jade Flesh Pill' that will cure the injuries of the Blue Sand Palm.

The expression on the old man's face filled with more uncertainty and hesitation. After a while he said: "What is your honourable name? How do you know about the Blue Sand Palm and how is there a Jade Flesh Pill? Could it be...?"

The boss replied: "You are correct. I am the son of the master of the Blue Sand Palm, so I definitely have a close relationship with it."

The old man did not reply, then he turned and grabbed the fish basket. His actions were extremely fast and nimble. The boss sneered, "It won't be that easy!" and with a loud "pang", he attacked the man from behind with his palm. The old man returned a palm strike, and, borrowing the momentum and force of his opponent's palm, he was sent flying several dozen feet away while grabbing hold onto the fish basket. Then he ran away in quick haste. The fish boss did not expect the old man to have such skills. He saw that he would not be able to catch up so he pulled up his sleeve and revealed a hidden weapon and shot it at the old man's back.

When the old man got hold of the fish he focused all of his efforts on running away and did not expect that there would be a hidden projectile coming his way. The weapon that was unleashed was an earthenware dart made of steel. He used much force in his throw and sent the dart flying away. Di Yun saw that the old man was unaware of the incoming projectile, so he decided to lend a hand by throwing a fish basket to deflect the path of the dart.

As Di Yun had lost all his martial arts, he did not have formidable arm strength. However, he was standing in a good position. He heard the sound of the steel dart pierce into the fish basket, then the fish basket flew forward several meters before falling on the ground.

The old man turned around when he heard sounds coming from behind. All he saw was the fish merchant pointing at Di Yun and scolding: "You bald thief! Which temple produces such untamed monks? How dare you interfere with members of the Iron Net Sect of Yangtze?"

Di Yun stared blankly at the man and thought: "Why is he scolding me as a bald thief?" He saw that the man was impetuous and had much influence and also said something about "Yangtze Iron Net Sect". He remembered that Brother Ding often told him that there were many clans and sects in the realm that should be avoided so as to stay away from trouble. He did not want to cause trouble for himself for no reason, so he apologized: "It is little brother's fault. Little brother asks for elder brother's forgiveness."

The fish boss shouted: "Who do you think you are to refer to me as a brother?" He pointed in the left and right direction and instructed one of the fish merchants: "Capture these two for me!"

All of a sudden, the sound of jingling bells could be heard approaching. Two horses came from the riverside west heading eastward. The old man was delighted and said: "My master is here, you can speak with him yourself."

The fish boss became nervous and asked: "Is it the 'Twin Knights of Bell Sword'?" Immediately after, he continued: "So what if it is the Twin Knights of Bell Sword? It is not in their right to show off their abilities in around the Yangtze."

Before he even finished speaking, the two horses arrived at the scene. Di Yun felt brightness in his eyes and saw that there were two horses, one yellow and one white. Both were full of spirit with a remarkable saddle. On top of the yellow horse sat a young man aged around 25 or 26 who was tall and skinny and wore a yellow garment. Sitting on the white horse was a young girl around 20 wearing a white garment; a red silk flower hanged on her left shoulder. Her complexion white and delicate and she gave off an appearance of beauty and intelligence. Both of them carried a long sword around their waist and held onto a horse whip. The two horses were shaped like regular horses, but the impressive part was that the yellow horse was completely yellow and the white horse was completely white without a single trace of mixed fur.

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A golden luan<sup>2</sup> bell was attached on the neck of the yellow horse while a silver luan bell was attached to the white horse; jingling sounds would be emitted as soon as the horse moved its head even slightly, the sounds were especially crisp and clear. It could be said that the horses and its masters were a perfect match. In Di Yun's entire life he had never seen such an impressive display of beauty and elegance. He could not help but think to himself: "So beautiful!"

The young man looked at the direction of the old man and asked: "Shui Fu, have you found the carp? Where is it?"

The old man replied: "Young Master Wang, I have indeed found the gold carp, but... they refuse to sell it to me and even resorted to violence."

The young man saw the dart that was stuck to the fish basket on the side and said: "Hmph, who uses such a vicious weapon?" He extended his whip and fetched the blue silk cloth attached to the tail of the steel dart. He said to the girl: "Sheng'mei, look at this. This is a 'Scorpion Tail Dart' from a bark cloth tree!"

The young girl asked: "Who was the one who used this dart?" Her voice was clear and bright.

The fish boss let out a cold laugh, his right hand holding on tightly to the blade around his waist area. "In the last few years, the Twin Knights of Bell Sword have made a name for themselves, do not think that the Iron Net Sect of Yangtze does not know this. However, if you intend to bully us to submission, I'm afraid it won't be so easy." The way he spoke gave out a hint of weakness covered by strength. It was clear that he was unwilling to come into conflict with them.

The young girl replied: "This type of scorpion tail dart is capable of eroding ones heart and decaying ones bones, it is much too violent. My father had said that nobody is allowed to use this, have you not heard? Fortunately, you did not use it to attack others and only practiced with a fish basket, but it is still unacceptable."

Shui Fu said: "My Lady, that is not what happened. This person attacked me with the dart. It is thanks to this young monk who blocked the path of the dart with the fish basket, otherwise I would have lost my life." As he spoke, he pointed at Di Yun.

Di Yun was bewildered. "One calls me a monk, the other calls me a bald thief. When did I become a monk?"

The young girl looked at Di Yun and nodded and gave a faint smile of acknowledgement. When Di Yun saw her smile, it looked as pretty as a blooming flower and was truly touching. He could not help but feel shy as his face flushed red.

When the young man heard Shui Fu's words, he immediately became angry and strict. He looked at the fish boss and asked: "Is this true?" Without even waiting for an answer, he twirled his horse whip and sent the dart flying at an intense speed. The sound of wind could be heard, and with a

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<sup>2</sup> A luan is a mythical bird related to the phoenix.



loud clap, it was pinned to a willow tree more than a hundred feet away. His arm strength was astonishing.

The fish boss remained resolute. "Are you trying to show off?"

The young man shouted: "I *am* trying to show off!" He lifted his horse whip and aimed it at his opponent's head. The fish boss unleashed his blade to counter. However, he did not expect that the whip would suddenly slant downwards and roll on the ground, its movements fluctuating irregularly and aimed to attack the lower half of his body. The fish boss tried to evade the whip, but the whip twirled upwards and wrapped itself around his right leg. The young man gently pushed his foot downward on the horse's stomach and at once the yellow horse rushed forward. The fish boss's technique in the lower half of his body was actually not that bad; even though the whip was coiled around his leg, the young man may not necessarily be able to pull him down. However, the young man strategized by first causing him to leap in midair so that he would lose his balance, then followed by whipping his leg. When the yellow horse rushed forward, the force was that of a thousand catties. Even if the fish boss's strength was greater, he would not be able to handle it. The yellow horse pulled his body upward and he was suspended in midair. The rest of the fish merchants all gasped and shouted; seven or eight of them rushed in as reinforcement.

The yellow horse went forward several dozen feet, turning the horse whip into the shape of a bowstring, then the young man, borrowing the momentum, slung the whip with his arm and hit the fish boss, sending him soaring into the distance. The fish boss had good martial arts but in midair he could not unleash any of it, and could not help but fall towards the river. Everyone on shore was startled and gasped at once. With a loud plop, the fish boss splashed into the water and disappeared into the river.

The young girl applauded and chuckled, then she unleashed her horsewhip amidst the crowd of fish merchants and began whipping left and right. The fish merchants scattered away in every direction. The fish basket was also knocked down, causing live fish and shrimp to run about.

As the fish boss grew up near the river, he was very good at swimming so he made his way to the opposite shore. He had already swum several hundred feet and began to curse profusely, but did not dare to go back for another fight.

Shui Fu picked up the basket containing the gold carp and opened it. "Young Master, look at those red lips and gold scales, and it is very fat!"

The young man replied: "Return to the inn quickly and give it to Old Master Hua so he can use it as a cure."

Shui Fu replied: "Yes," then walked toward Di Yun and bowed. "I thank this little monk for saving my life. May I ask for little monk's Buddhist name?"

Di Yun heard this old man call him a little monk many times, causing him to get goosebumps. He did not know how to answer immediately.

The young man said: "Go quickly. This task cannot be delayed."

Shui Fu replied: "Yes." He did not wait for Di Yun's reply and left.

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Di Yun saw that these two young people were both righteous and elegant with impressive martial arts. He felt a sense of envy and admiration. He had the intent of forming a friendship with them but they did not dismount from their horses. He wanted to ask for their names but did not want to be embarrassed.

As he hesitated to ask, the young man fetched out a gold ingot from his bosom and said: "Little monk, thank you for saving the life of our old servant. This gold ingot will be for little monk's incense oil expenses." He gently threw the ingot toward Di Yun.

Di Yun caught it with his left hand, then threw it back at the young man and said: "That is not necessary. I would like to ask for your honourable names."

The young man saw the way Di Yun caught the gold ingot and concluded that he knew martial arts. He did not wait for the ingot to fly toward him before twirling and wrapping it around his horse whip. "Since little monk is a man from the martial world, he has most probably heard of the Twin Knights of Bell Sword."

Di Yun saw the way the young man brandished the ingot with his horse whip causing it to dance around frivolously. "Just now I heard the fish merchants call you two the Twin Knights of Bell Sword, but I do not know your honourable surname."

The young man became angry and displeased. He thought: "If you know that we are the Twin Knights of Bell Sword, how can you not know my name?" He groaned but did not reply.

Suddenly, a wind from the river blew over Di Yun and revealed a corner of his monk garment."

The young girl was startled. "He... he is a blood sabre monk... from... from the Dark Qinghai Cult."

The young man's expression was filled with hatred. "That's right. Hmph, get lost!"

Di Yun was startled. "I... I..." He took a step forward and asked the girl: "Lady, what are you talking about?"

The young girl's face was filled with hate and fright and said: "You... you... don't get near me. Go away!"

Di Yun was at a loss and asked: "What are you talking about?" He walked forward another step.

The young girl grabbed her horse whip and slashed it in midair. Di Yun did not expect that the girl would attack; he turned his head to dodge, but he did not react fast enough. The whip slashed him right across the face, from the upper left of his forehead to the bridge of his nose, then to the right side of his temple.

Di Yun was angry. "Why... why are you hitting me?" He saw the girl attack again and he tried to grab the whip from her, but he did not expect her whip techniques to change. When he tried to grab the whip with his right hand he was already slashed in the forehead. Then he felt a great pain from his back, he was kicked by the young man from behind. Di Yun could not keep his balance and fell over. The young man pressed forward with his horse and ran him over. Di Yun rolled outward and in a

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daze he could only hear the tinkling sound of silver bells as the white horse kicked him in the chest. He could not understand what was happening, but he knew that if the horse kicked him in a crucial spot he would lose his life immediately. He curled up his body and heard a crack. His vision was filled with dancing stars and then he passed out.

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He slowly regained his consciousness. He did not know how much time had passed. In a daze he tried to pick himself up, but there was an extreme pain on his left waist and he nearly fainted again. Then he spat out a mouthful of fresh blood. He turned his head around and saw that his right leg was covered in blood and bent sideways. He was startled and wondered: "What happened to my leg?" After a while, he understood. "The young lady's horse trampled over my leg and broke it."

He felt completely exhausted and the pain in his leg and back was unbearable. In that moment he again had the intention of giving himself up in despair. "I no longer want to live. I will just lie here and wait for my death." He did not groan and only wished for a quick death. However, even dying was not easy. After lying down for a while he realized it wasn't going to happen and thought: "Why can't I die? Why can't I die?"

After a very long time, he thought: "I have no animosity toward them nor have I wronged them in any way. We were just having a conversation, why did they treat me like this?" He pondered deeply but did not have a clue. He thought aloud: "I am so stupid, if Brother Ding came back to life, even if he could not help me, he could at least provide a reasonable explanation to this incident."

As he thought about Ding Dian, he remembered: "I promised Brother Ding that I would bury him together with Lady Ling. This wish has not been fulfilled yet, I cannot die." He felt his waist with his hands and realized that the package containing Ding Dian's ashes did not break apart and breathed a sigh of relief. He tried to get up again and felt a sensation surging up his throat, it was blood. He knew that the more blood he spat out the weaker he would become, so he channelled his energy and suppressed his blood pressure. But he felt a weird sensation in his mouth and he spat another mouthful of fresh blood on the ground.

The most painful part of his body was his broken leg, it felt as if several hundred knives stabbed constantly at his leg. Eventually, he crawled his way to the shade of a willow tree and thought: "I cannot die. I have to stay alive at any cost. And to stay alive I have to eat food." He saw on the ground the fish and shrimp that fell off the basket earlier. They had died a long time ago. He picked up a few shrimps and stuffed it in his mouth. "I will first fix my broken leg, then I will figure out a way to get out of here."

He looked in all four directions and saw various items left behind by the fish merchants scattered about. He crawled forward and grabbed a small paddle and a fish net. He slowly ripped apart the fish net and put it around his leg. Then he put the paddle against his leg for support and tied it all together with a rope.

He rested for a while. Every time he wanted to get back up the pain would knock him out. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply and waited to recover his energy before getting up again. He thought: "It will take at least two months for my leg to fully recover. Where can I find a good place to rest?" In a flash he saw on a row of boats by the river bank and thought: "I will rest on the boats, then I don't have to move." He was afraid that the vicious fish merchants would return, so with all his

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

strength he crawled his way to the boats without rest. He untied the ship's hawser, picked up a paddle and began rowing toward the river.

He looked down and saw that a corner of his monk gown was flipped over, exposing a red and bloody short blade embroidered by red thread. On the tip of the blade, the red thread gave the illusion of three spots of what appeared to be blood dripping down. The shape of the blade looked lively and frightening. Then he came to a realization: "Oh, yes. This gown belongs to the evil monk Bao Xiang. Those two must have thought I was also from the same clan." He extended his hand and felt his own bald head.

He then realized why the old man constantly called him a "little monk" and why the Iron Net Sect of Yangtze called him a "little bald thief". He had long dressed himself up as a monk and he did not even realize it. "The corner of my gown was flipped over. The lady must have mistaken me as a blood sabre monk from the Dark Qinghai Cult. This bloody sabre of mine is frightening; the monks from this sect must commit unimaginable misdeeds. I already know this much, using Bao Xiang as an example."

His leg was broken for no good reason. At first, he was extremely angry and wanted to figure out the reason behind this incident. But now, he removed his animosity against the Twin Knights of Bell Sword and furthermore felt that the two knights were heroic for trying to eliminate evildoers. However, the two of them were profound in martial arts and each had a strong moral character. Even if this misunderstanding was resolved, he did not feel worthy of making friends with them.

After the boat was slowly paddled about a dozen li, he saw a small town on shore. He gazed from far away and saw that there were many people in town. "I should not wear this gown any longer as it can cause me a lot of trouble, I should change into new clothes as soon as possible." As soon as the boat made its way to shore, he took the paddle and used it as support. He walked slowly and struggled his way limping on land. The people in the town gave him strange looks when they saw this young monk crippled and face covered in blood. This feeling of suspect and coldness did not bother him in the least bit, as he had suffered much worse throughout the years.

He slowly made his way down the street. He saw an old clothing store and went in to buy a long dark gown and a new set of clothing. He had to change into his new clothes so he undressed and covered himself in the long dark gown while he changed. Then he bought a felt hat to cover his bald head. Afterwards, he went to buy food at a local restaurant to replenish his energy. He waited sitting on the table and nearly fainted of exhaustion, then he spat out another two mouthfuls of fresh blood.

The server brought him a plate of tofu with fish and a plate of meat mixed with black bean sauce. Di Yun became more alert as he smelt the scent of rice and fish. He picked up his chopsticks and ate two mouthfuls of rice, then a piece of meat. As he was chewing, he heard the sound of jingling bells coming from the west, a wave of luan bells approaching.

He did not fully swallow the piece of meat as he thought: "The Twin Knights of Bell Sword are coming again. Should I go out and clear up our misunderstanding? They trampled my leg with their horse but I am actually innocent. If I do not explain myself, they will think I'm guilty."

However, in the past few years he had already suffered endless counts of misfortunes and was already getting used to it, so he thought: "I have already suffered so many injustices in my life. What

does it matter if I suffer again?" The sound of bells was approaching closer and closer. Di Yun turned around facing the wall and did not dare to make contact with them.

At that moment, someone tapped him on the shoulder and laughed: "Little monk, you have done good deeds. Our master wishes to drink with you."

Di Yun was startled. He turned around saw four officers; two were holding iron chains and the other two were holding blades. All four of them looked extremely cautious. Di Yun let out an interjection of surprise. He stood up and grabbed the plate of meat on the table and threw it at one of the officers. Then he used his elbows and flipped the table over, causing the tofu, white rice, and soup to splash in the direction of the second officer. He thought: "The officers from the Jingzhou Prefecture have come after me. If I end up in the hands of Ling Tuisi, how can I keep myself alive?"

Two of the officers were burnt by the splash of food and soup and moved back quickly. Di Yun took the opportunity to run away. But he only made one step before he fell on the floor. In his haste to escape, he forgot that his left leg was broken. The third officer lifted his sabre and was about to slash him. Although Di Yun lost his martial arts, he was still more than capable of overcoming one officer. He grabbed the officer by the wrist and took hold of the blade.

The four officers saw that he was now wielding a weapon and shouted loudly: "This perverted monk resists arrest!" Another said: "The evil blood sabre monks have committed another crime!" Another said: "The perverted monk who killed the lady of the official is here!" As they shouted, many citizens of the small town gathered at once and saw Di Yun covered with scars and bruises all over his face. They did not dare to get too close.

Di Yun heard the yells of the four men and thought: "Could it be that these people aren't from Jingzhou Prefecture?" Then he shouted loudly in defense: "What are you talking about? Who is the perverted monk?"

The sound of bells fast approached; a yellow horse and a white horse made its way to the scene. The Twin Knights of Bell Sword rode their high horses in arrogance and had seen the entire incident. The two stared blankly at Di Yun for a moment and thought that he looked familiar. Then at once they recognized that he was the evil blood sabre monk. They thought that he was wearing a disguise in order to conceal his features.

An officer said: "Hey, big monk, if you wish to be romantic and lascivious that is fine, but why do you have to kill the lady afterwards? A good man will stand up to the consequences of his actions. Come with me to the county prefecture and we will fight in court."

Another officer said: "You bought yourself a new disguise but we saw through it. There is no way you will escape today, just give up peacefully."

Di Yun scolded: "You people speak nonsense and declare an innocent man guilty!"

An officer replied: "There is no unjust treatment here. Three nights ago you snuck into the Li residence and murdered two ladies of the family in cold blood. I saw this very clearly. The features of your eyes, eyebrows, nose, and mouth match exactly. That person was definitely you."

## Chapter 5 – Mouse Soup

The Twin Knights of Bell Sword reined their horses and watched from the side. “Biaoge<sup>3</sup>, this monk’s martial arts is not impressive. If we did not consider the fact that he saved Shui Fu’s life, we would have killed him already. It turns out that... that he is such an evil person.”

The young man replied: “I also think this is strange. It is said that this evil monk has done many indescribably evil deeds on both sides of the Yangtze in the last few days, taking the lives of dozens. The officials could do nothing to stop him. However, the heroes of Lianghu<sup>4</sup> need not be startled or afraid. Judging by the little monk’s martial arts, his martial brother or teacher could not be that impressive either.”

“It could be the case that one of them has profound martial arts, else why would the heroes of Lianghu request my father for assistance? And why would they further ask for the help of Uncle Lu, Uncle Hua, and Uncle Liu?”

“Hmph, the heroes of Lianghu must have lost their minds. Is there anyone under heaven who would require the combined forces of the four heroes known as ‘Luo Hua Liu Shui’<sup>5</sup> in order to be subdued?”

“Hehe, to ask for the combined forces of the Twin Knights of Bell Sword sounds more appropriate.”

“Biaomei<sup>6</sup>, go on ahead and wait for me. I will take care of this bald thief by myself.”

“I will watch from inside.”

“No, do not stay inside. In the future, when the people of the martial world bring up this incident, they will say that I Wang Xiaofeng fought alone and killed the evil monk and implicate the heroine Shui Sheng also. You know how much nonsense people talk in the realm.”

“Right, you have thought this through. I am not as careful as you.”

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<sup>3</sup> An older male cousin from the female line.

<sup>4</sup> Referring to Hubei and Hunan.

<sup>5</sup> “落花流水” (Luohua Liushui) is a group of four martial artists in the realm. There is no good way to translate this phrase so I have left it as is.

<sup>6</sup> Younger female cousin from the female line.

## Chapter 6 – Blood Sabre Elder



*He reined the horse and turned it back around, the horse slightly rubbed against the other horse as it passed through. Shui Sheng saw a flash of red light and her nose felt a slight cool sensation, following which the strand of hair placed on her nose disappeared.*

Di Yun saw as more and more people gathered around and knew that his chances of escaping were slim to none. He raised his blade and said: "Get out of my way!" With his left underarm supported by a paddle, he headed eastward. The bystanders on the streets shouted and dispersed in all directions.

The four officers yelled: "Perverted monk, where do you think you're going?" They boldly ran after him. Di Yun tilted his blade slightly and with the flip of his wrist he wounded the arm of one of the officers. The officer said: "This murderer resists arrest! This murderer resists arrest!"

Shui Sheng prompted her horse to move away. Wang Xiaofeng followed through with his horse. He unleashed his horse whip and twirled it around Di Yun's blade then flung it away. Di Yun did not have any strength on his hand so the blade flew away instantly. Wang Xiaofeng stretched his left arm forward and grabbed him by the collar, picked him up and said: "Perverted monk, you have committed many crimes in Lianghu, you do not deserve to live!" Then with his right hand he unsheathed his sword with a flash intending to behead Di Yun.

The bystanders cheered in unison: "Excellent! Excellent! Kill this perverted monk!"

Di Yun was suspended in midair and could not resist in any way. He sighed deeply to himself and thought: "I am destined to be treated with injustice, there is nothing that can be done." He saw Wang Xiaofeng's long sword was already raised and he laughed bitterly. "Brother Ding, it is not that I did not try, only that I am much too unfortunate."

Suddenly, from the distance came an old and withered voice that said: "Stay your hand! Do not hurt him!" Wang Xiaofeng turned around and saw a monk dressed in a black robe. This monk was extremely old and his face was covered with wrinkles. The texture and color of the monk garment he wore was exactly the same as Di Yun's. Wang Xiaofeng's expression changed for the worse as he knew that this person was a blood sabre monk from the Dark Qinghai Cult. Then followed that he raised his sword to slash Di Yun's neck, intending to first kill the perverted monk, then deal with the older monk. The tip of the sword was within a foot of Di Yun's neck, when suddenly he felt his right elbow became numb, he had already been hit at an acupoint by a hidden weapon. The sword on his hand fell forward. Although there was not much energy to this fall, the edge of the sword was still sharp, and left a scar on Di Yun's left cheek.

The old monk's figure was like that of the wind, he came close and with one palm he knocked Wang Xiaofeng off his horse. With his left hand he grabbed Di Yun and with the help of his right leg he got on top of the yellow horse. Usually, when someone gets on a horse, they set their left foot on the left stirrup and then use their right leg to climb on the horseback. However, this old man did not jump or use the stirrup, he simply lifted his right leg and got on the saddle. He moved the horse towards Shui Sheng's direction.

When Shui Sheng heard Wang Xiaofeng's cry of alarm, she immediately reined her horse. Wang Xiaofeng said: "Biaomei, get away!" Shui Sheng hesitated then turned around with her horse, but the old man had already caught up with the yellow horse. He put Di Yun behind the white horse's saddle and released, with the intention of throwing Shui Sheng off the horse. However, Shui Sheng already readied her long sword and prepared to stab at his head. When the old monk saw her



beautiful appearance he stared blankly and said, "Very pretty!" and with his arm he sealed the acupoint on her waist.

Shui Sheng's sword missed its target and she felt as if she had no energy left in her entire body and at once the sword fell on the ground. She was startled and frightened. She wanted to get off the horse but felt numbness around her waist and she could not move her legs.

The old man pulled the reins of the white horse with his left hand and with both legs he coerced both the white horse and yellow horse, the sounds of jingling bells could be heard as he got away.

Wang Xiaofeng was on the ground and yelled: "Biaomei! Biaomei!" He looked helplessly as her cousin was captured by the two perverted monk; he knew the consequences would be severe. However, his entire body was numb, and even though he exhausted all the energy in his body, he could not even move an inch.

He heard the officers yell: "Capture the perverted monk!" Another said: "The evil blood sabre monk has escaped!" Another said: "They are denying arrest!"

Di Yun was on the horse and the ride was shaky and unstable. Naturally he grabbed onto something, it felt like a soft tentacle. He looked down and saw that what he grabbed was Shui Sheng's garment on the back of her waist. Shui Sheng was startled and reprimanded: "Evil monk, let go of me!" Di Yun was also startled and immediately released his hold and grabbed onto the saddle. But he sat behind Shui Sheng and the two of them could not help but make bodily contact. Shui Sheng shouted: "Let go of me! Let go of me!" The evil monk was fed up with her complaints and extended his hands to seal her speech acupoint. From then on, Shui Sheng did not utter another word.

The old monk was on the yellow horse and constantly found himself staring at Shui Sheng's face and body. He praised: "Very beautiful! Extraordinary! This old monk has been blessed with good fortune!" Although Shui Sheng could not speak, she could still hear. She was so afraid of his words that she was spooked out of her mind and nearly passed out.

The old monk followed the road heading westward, trying to find the most secluded place. After travelling some distance, he felt that the jingling noises of the luan bells on the horses were hurting his ears and may also lure people to chase after them, so he ripped off each gold bell one by one from the horse. These bells were made from gold and silver threads and hung around the horse's neck, he pulled it all away and put it in his bosom piece by piece.

The old monk did not allow the horses to rest and continued to travel until night. They reached a riverbank on top of a hillside by a precipice. He looked all around and saw that the area was desolate and without buildings, so he carried Di Yun down the horse and let him rest on the ground. Then he took Shui Sheng down as well, and then pulled the two horses under a huge tree. He looked at Shui Sheng in great detail and sneered: "Wonderful! This old monk has good fortune!" He sat down at the direction of the river, closed his eyes and began to channel his energy.

Di Yun was sitting opposite of Shui Sheng and thought: "There were sure many strange occurrences today. Two benevolent people wanted to kill me, and this old monk saved me. This old monk most likely belongs to the same clan as Bao Xiang, so he is definitely not a good person. If he violates this young lady, what am I to do?"

The sky was gradually getting darker and the sounds of the river flow and wind blowing against palm trees could be heard; the nocturnal birds began chirping. Once in a while when he lift his head he could see the old monk with the expression akin to that of a corpse, and his heart started beating faster. He looked to the side and saw a corner of silk clothes exposed, Shui Sheng had passed out. He wanted to speak out to the old monk several times, but upon seeing his solemn expression while channelling his energy, he did not dare to disturb him.

After a long time, the old monk stood up gently and raised his left foot; the sole of his foot facing upwards while his left foot remained on ground. Both his hands spread out to the bright moon above the mountains. Di Yun thought: "Where have I seen this position? Right, it was from Bao Xiang's little booklet, there was this odd diagram." When he saw the old monk stood this way like a statue without the slightest sign of movement. After a while he heard a shout, the old monk jumped up and turned his body around. Both his hands on the ground and with a push, the top of his head on the ground and his two hands stretched evenly, his two legs against each other in the air.

Di Yun thought this was interesting and took out the booklet from his bosom. He searched for the diagram and under the moonlight he saw that it was exactly the position of this old monk. He realized: "This must be the cultivation method of their sect."

When he saw that the old monk had his eyes closed and his complete attention focused on his training, with each and every stance becoming more intense, he knew that it would be some time before his training would be completed. He put the booklet back in his bosom and thought: "Although the old monk saved my life, he belongs to an evil sect and harbours malicious intentions toward the young lady. I should take the chance to escape with the lady on horse while the monk is focused on his training."

He knew that this endeavour was extremely risky, but he could not allow a benevolent lady like Shui Sheng to be taken advantage of. At once he turned around and quietly crawled away. Back in prison he used to train with Ding Dian a lot; he knew that during training, whenever one was meditating like that, one would have to focus their complete attention and their senses would be reduced. As long as this old monk is focused on his training, he should be able to rescue the lady without being noticed.

When Di Yun turned around, his broken leg hurt so much that it was unbearable. He could only use the energy of his body on his hands and slowly crawl in the grass. Fortunately the old monk indeed did not notice. His head was lowered and the moonlight precisely shone on Shui Sheng's face. She opened her eyes and saw a pair of round eyes in front of her, she was very afraid. Di Yun was afraid of alerting the old monk so he did not speak up, but with a gesture indicated that he was here to rescue her.

Di Yun extended his arm to help her up. He pointed to the horses by the tree with the intention of escaping with her. Shui Sheng felt weak all over and did not know what to do. If Di Yun had recovered from his leg injury, he could have carried her, but he could barely manage to get there by himself, there was no way he could take her with him. The only way was to wait for her acupoint to unseal itself, she did not know how to unseal her own acupoint. All he could do was give her gestures, pointing at the various pressure points in her body, hoping that she would understand how to unseal her acupoint.

When Shui Sheng saw that he was pointing at various acupoints in her body, she could not help but feel ashamed and resentful. "This evil monk must be trying to torture me with some weird techniques. As soon as I am able to move, I will ram my head against the wall to prevent their harassment."

Di Yun saw that her expression was strange and thought: "Most likely she doesn't understand what I'm doing." But besides having her unseal her acupoint, there was no second option to escape. However he could not say a word, and hinted: "Young lady, I am only trying to help you escape. Please forgive my rudeness." And at once he extended his hand and massaged several parts of her back.

He massaged her back several times, but it did not unseal her acupoint in the least bit. But Shui Sheng's was alarmed and became even more angry. Her cousin Wang Xiaofeng had practiced martial arts together under her father since they were small, they could be considered childhood sweethearts. Her father had long suggested to betroth her to her cousin. The two of them travelled the realm together and treated each other with utmost respect, they did not even hold hands. When Di Yun touched her like this, tears began to fall from her eyes.

Di Yun was startled by her reaction. "Why is she crying?" Hmm, it must be that when I touched her sealed acupoint it caused her pain, that's why she cried. I will try to unseal the acupoint on her waist instead." As he said this he moved his hand to the back of her waist and gently began to knead it. Shui Sheng began to cry even more, and Di Yun became anxious and perplexed. "So it turns out that the acupoint on her waist is causing her pain as well, then what should I do?" He knew that females valued their sanctity the most, he did not even dare to look at her chest or legs or neck, much less touch it. "I have no good way of unsealing her acupoint and if I try arbitrarily, that could have negative consequences. I can only carry her downhill and attempt to escape." At once he held both her arms intending to carry her on his back.

Shui Sheng was extremely furious at his actions and nearly fainted several times. When she saw him move his hands, she thought he wanted to remove her clothing, she was so mad her breath was stuck in her chest and would not exhale. Di Yun put her arms together and was about to move her body when the congested breath of air rushed out of her chest; her mute acupoint was unsealed and she immediately shouted: "Villain! Let go of me! Don't touch me!" When she shouted so abruptly, Di Yun was startled. He let go of her and she fell on the ground. He could not balance himself and fell on top of her.

Her shout also caused the evil monk to awake at once. He opened his eyes and saw the two of them on top of each other, and heard Shui Sheng yell: "Evil monk, just kill me! Let go of me!"

The old monk grinned: "Little scoundrel, why so impatient? You dare taste your senior's ladies?" He came forward and grabbed Di Yun from behind, moved back a few steps and put him down on the ground and sneered: "Very good! Very good! I admire the courage of young men such as yourself. Even though you broke one of your legs, you do not care about the pain, you only want woman! Wonderful! Wonderful! You have guts! Your style suits my appetite."

Di Yun's intentions were misunderstood by the two of them. He did not know whether to laugh or cry. He thought: "If I speak the truth, the evil monk can easily kill me in one strike. I should improvise and find another way to escape with the lady."

## Chapter 6 – Blood Sabre Elder

The old monk said: “You are the newest disciple of Bao Xiang, are you not?” He did not wait for Di Yun’s answer and continued: “Bao Xiang must like you a lot, he even gave you his blood sabre monk garment. Did he give you the Blood Sabre Sutra?”

Di Yun thought: “I wonder what this Blood Sabre Sutra is?” He trembled and took out the yellow booklet from his bosom. The old monk browsed through it and gave it back to him. He gently patted him on the head and said: “Very good! What is your name?”

Di Yun replied: “My name is Di Yun.”

The old monk replied: “Very good! Has your teacher taught you the techniques of self-cultivation?”

Di Yun replied: “He has not.”

The old monk said: “Hmm, that is not a problem. Where is your teacher now?”

How would Di Yun dare to tell him that Bao Xiang was not his teacher, much less tell him that he was already dead? He only uttered: “He... he is travelling on a ship.”

The old monk asked: “Has your teacher told you the name of your grand-teacher?”

Di Yun replied, “No.”

The old monk replied: “My name is the ‘Blood Sabre Elder’. You little scoundrel have won my delight. If you follow your grand-teacher, I can promise that you can get your hands on any beautiful woman you want in the world.”

Di Yun thought, “So he is Bao Xiang’s teacher,” and asked “They called you the ‘evil blood sabre monk’, grand... grand teacher, we belong to this sect?”

The Blood Sabre Elder replied: “Hehe, that little scoundrel Bao Xiang sure is tight with words. He did not even tell of our clan’s history to his beloved disciple. We are a branch of the Dark Qinghai Cult called the Blood Sabre Clan. Your grand-teacher is the fourth generation leader of the clan. You should focus on practising your martial arts. Who can say? Maybe the position of sixth generation leader will fall into your hands. Hmm, so your leg is broken. No big deal, I will fix it for you.”

He inspected the Di Yun’s injury carefully and adjusted his leg tendons, then he fetched a porcelain bottle from his bosom and produced some medical powder and smeared it on his wound. “This medicine is produced by our clan and it is used to treat these kinds of injuries; within a month your broken leg should fully recover. We will go to Jingzhou tomorrow, your teacher will be there as well.”

Di Yun became startled. “I cannot go to Jingzhou.”

After the Blood Sabre Elder finished bandaging Di Yun’s wounds, he turned to look at Shui Sheng and sneered: “Little scoundrel, this little girl is pretty... not bad... truly not bad. She declares herself what ‘Twin Knights of Bell Sword’. Her father Shui Dai belongs to a righteous sect and considers himself to be a top and renowned figure in the martial world, but he overestimates his capabilities and dares to cross paths with the Blood Sabre Clan. Yesterday, he killed one of your martial uncles.

Damn it! He would not have guessed that I have now captured her beloved daughter, hehe. We will tarnish the reputation of her father. Let us strip this girl of all her clothes and put her on the horse and take a tour around the city. Let everyone see what the daughter of the great Hero Shui really looks like."

Shui Sheng's heart began to beat at an alarming rate and she nearly vomited. She thought: "The young monk is vicious, but the older monk is even more vicious! How can I kill myself to preserve my chastity and my daddy's prestige?"

Suddenly the Blood Sabre Elder laughed: "As soon as you speak of Cao Cao, Cao Cao has arrived<sup>1</sup>! People are here to save her!"

Di Yun felt pleased and asked: "Where are they?"

The Blood Sabre Elder replied: "They are within five li. Hehe, there are 17 of them in total."

Di Yun listened closely for any sounds and he could faintly hear the sound of horses approaching from the southeast direction. But the distance was so great that even these sounds were barely audible, it was impossible to distinguish the number of riders in total. But the old monk only needed to listen once and was able to point out exactly how many people there were. His attentiveness was startling.

The Blood Sabre Elder said: "Your broken leg has been applied with medicine, within six hours you cannot move, otherwise you will be crippled. However, within the distance of one or two hundred li I did not hear of any profound people. These 17 people are coming after me on horses, I will kill them all."

Di Yun was unwilling to let him kill members of righteous sects, so he hurriedly said: "If we just stay here and remain quiet, they may not be able to find us. They are the majority, grand... grand teacher, you should be more careful."

The Blood Sabre Elder was delighted by his remark and said: "You little scoundrel have a good heart, it is indeed hard to come by. Your grand-teacher I really like you." He reached for his waist and pulled out a flexible steel sabre. The blade of the sabre trembled violently like that of a serpent. The moonlight reflected the gloomy red color of the edge of the blade; the distinct hint of blood could be seen, it was quite disturbing.

Di Yun shivered and asked: "This... this is a blood sabre?"

The Blood Sabre Elder replied: "On the night of the full moon, this precious blade must be used to behead people as an offer of sacrifice, otherwise its sharpness will diminish and would be unfavourable to its owner. Tonight is the night of the full moon and these 17 people are coming just at the right time to be sacrificed for my blade. Oh precious sabre, tonight you will be able to eat your fill of human blood."

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<sup>1</sup> In reference to Cao Cao, a renowned ruler during the Three Kingdoms period.

Shui Sheng listened as the sound of horses gradually drew closer and she rejoiced. But when she heard the Blood Sabre Elder's words she felt guilty, as if anyone who came would meet certain death. However, she did not believe it entirely and felt concerned. She wondered: "Did my daddy and Biaoge come too?"

After a while, the moonlight shone as horses approached up the mountain path. Di Yun counted the number of people and it indeed totalled 17. But the 17 riders were in travelling in great haste and rapidly passed through the sloping path of the mountain, not bothering to come up the mountain to take a look.

Shui Sheng raised her voice and yelled: "I am over here! I am over here!" When the 17 riders heard her voice, they immediately turned around.

One man shouted: "Biaomei! Biaomei!" It was none other than Wang Xiaofeng. Shui Sheng wanted to cry for help again when the Blood Sabre Elder, with a flick of his finger, sent a piece of rock flying her direction and sealed the speech acupoint on her body.

The 17 people got off their horses and got together for a discussion. The Blood Sabre Elder suddenly reached for Di Yun and helped him up. He said in a very clear voice: "The fourth generation clan leader the Blood Sabre Elder and the sixth generation disciple Di Yun of the Blood Sabre Clan of the Dark Qinghai Cult are here!" Then he bent over and grabbed Shui Sheng's clothes from behind and shouted: "Shui Dai's little girl has become my grand-disciple Di Yun's eighteenth concubine! Whoever wants to drink at their wedding feast can come up here! Haha! Haha!" He intentionally displayed his profound internal energy; his laughter vibrated across the valley and could be heard from far away. All 17 riders were overwhelmed with shock and turned pale.

Wang Xiaofeng saw that his cousin was at the hands of the evil monk without any ability to resist and even heard him say that she had become the "eighteenth concubine of his grand-disciple Di Yun". He was afraid that she had been violated and his insides began to burn at the thought of this. He roared loudly and with rushed up the hillside with his long sword in hand. The other 16 all shouted: "Kill the evil blood sabre monk! Rid the realm of this villain! Such a savage and perverted monk cannot be forgiven!"

Di Yun watched as he knew a battle was about to ensue. He felt completely awkward and embarrassed and thought: "These people treat me as a monk belonging to the Blood Sabre Clan. Even if I had a hundred mouths I would not be able to justify myself. I can only hope that they can kill the old monk and rescue Lady Shui, but... but... if the evil monk dies, then I will perish as well." On one hand he wished that the heroes of the Central Plains would kill the monk, but on the other hand he wanted the monk to win as well. He did not know which side to root for.

He glanced over at the Blood Sabre Elder and only saw him laugh coldly, not in the least bit worried about the overwhelming majority. He carried a person in each hand with the blood sabre across his lips, giving off a sinister appearance. When the majority was within a distance of 200 feet or so, he gently put Di Yun aside, being careful not to damage his legs. After another 100 feet or so, he put Shui Sheng beside Di Yun, still biting on the blood sabre with both his hands pushing against his waist. The night wind blew against his oversized monk garment.

Wang Xiaofeng shouted: "Biaomei, are you alright?"

Shui Sheng wanted to yell out for her cousin, but how could she speak out? But as she saw her cousin was getting closer and closer, she felt a mixture of emotions; happiness, worry, regret, and gratefulness. All she wanted to do was be embraced and cry heartily, she wanted to explain to him the suffering and humiliation she had been through.

Wang Xiaofeng focused his complete attention on finding his cousin, looking in all directions. He slowed down his pace and saw seven or eight people caught up to him. Under the moonlight he saw the Blood Sabre Elder up at the highest part of the hill in a fierce composure. When the majority reached within 50 or 60 feet, they all stopped at once. The two parties opposed each other, then with a loud shout, two men rushed forward together. One wielded a gold whip while another wielded twin sabres.

The two men rushed forward several dozen feet. The one who wielded the twin sabres was agile and quickly arrived behind the Blood Sabre Elder, one on each side. They shouted loudly and attacked together in unison. The Blood Sabre Elder turned his body to evade the twin sabres, dodging left and right; his blood sabre still remained in his mouth. Suddenly, with his left hand he grabbed the handle of the sabre and with a slash he cut the head of the gold whip user in half. After he killed this man, he immediately put the sabre back in his mouth. The one wielding the twin sabres was extremely frightened and sad, his twin sabres danced around like snowflakes as he rushed forward. The Blood Sabre Elder intercepted the two sabres with his bare hands, then unexpectedly with his right hand he took the own sabre out of his mouth and with one slash, he cut his opponent from the top of his head down across to his waist.

The majority was startled at this performance and retreated several steps. They saw the sabre filled with fresh blood dripping from the corner of his mouth.

Although they were all afraid of the Blood Sabre Elder, their hearts were still filled with desires of revenge. With a loud shout, four more people attacked from the left and right sides. The Blood Sabre Elder ran westward and the four of them shouted in pursuit. They followed for a few dozen feet and the speed of each individual could be differentiated as the Blood Sabre Elder came to a halt. Two people attacked from the front while two attacked from behind. The Blood Sabre Elder turned around and rushed forward and with a red flash, the two people in front of him were killed immediately by his sabre. The two people behind him hesitated for a moment before they were immediately killed by a slash across the neck.

Di Yun hid behind the bushes and saw that the monk had already killed six people. His craftiness and technique was very violent, it was truly unfathomable. He thought: "With the way things are going, the remaining 11 people will be killed in no time at all. What can I do?"

Suddenly he heard someone shout: "Biaomei! Biaomei! Where are you?" It was Wang Xiaofeng of the Twin Knights of Bell Sword.

Shui Sheng was lying beside Di Yun. Because her speech acupoint was sealed she could not speak out, but in her heart she called: "Biaoge! I am over here!"

Wang Xiaofeng scurried around searching through bushes relentlessly. Suddenly the mountain wind fluttered and revealed a corner of Shui Sheng's garment. Wang Xiaofeng shouted: "She's over here!" Shui Sheng was so happy that she shed tears, her entire body was trembling. Wang Xiaofeng

shouted: “Biaomei! Biaomei!” He rushed forward and embraced Shui Sheng tightly. When the two of them reunited under such circumstances, formalities and etiquette was hardly a concern.

Wang Xiaofeng asked: “Biaomei, are you alright?” He saw that Shui Sheng did not reply and became suspicious. He put her down and noticed that her feet were on the ground and she was facing upward. Wang Xiaofeng knew the technique of sealing acupoints but was not proficient at it, though he did practise the fundamentals. He immediately extended his hands and reached for the three acupoints located on her waist and back, releasing them at once.

Shui Sheng shouted: “Biaoge! Biaoge!”

When Di Yun saw Wang Xiaofeng approach, he knew that his life was in jeopardy. He slowly crawled away as Wang Xiaofeng released her acupoints. Shui Sheng heard the rustling sounds of bushes and recalled the humiliation that the vicious monk gave her. She pointed at Di Yun and said to Wang Xiaofeng: “Quick, kill that vicious monk for me!” As soon as he heard this, Wang Xiaofeng unsheathed his sword at once and rushed towards Di Yun. When Di Yun heard Shui Sheng’s cries, he knew that he was in trouble. He did not wait for the sword to approach him and quickly rolled away. Fortunately, he was on an incline and took the opportunity to roll downhill.

Wang Xiaofeng followed and tried to stab Di Yun. Just as he was about to reach him, he suddenly heard a loud voice as his vision was blurred by a red flash. In extreme urgency he reacted with the nine stances of “Peacock Spreads its Tails” and his sword danced like a ray of light as he strove in self-defense. He heard the sound of jingling bells, the clashing sound of sword and sabre like a string of pearls. In an instant, it had collided more than 30 times.

Wang Xiaofeng’s swordplay had already received the true teachings of his teacher Shui Dai. This technique of “Peacock Spreads its Tails” tossed and turned relentlessly and consisted of nine stances in total. He had practiced this thoroughly during his training. However, at this moment it was a matter of life and death, and his opponent’s stances were executed with extreme speed, how could he simply block every stance as it came his way? Therefore, he could only execute the nine stances out of a sense of urgency and necessity. The Blood Sabre Elder attacked him 36 times with his sabre, each strike faster than the last. Unexpectedly, all his attacks were deflected by his opponent.

The other fighters watched and were dazzled by this brilliant display of speed. At this time, of the 17 people, nine were already killed by the Blood Sabre Elder. Including Shui Sheng, only nine people remained. Everyone’s hands were drenched in cold sweat and they all had the same thought: “The Twin Knights of Bell Sword live up to their reputation. Only he is able to withstand the lightning-fast attacks of the Blood Sabre Elder.”

In actuality, all the Blood Sabre Elder had to do was reduce the speed of his attacks, and within a dozen stances or so, Wang Xiaofeng would most certainly lose his life. However, the Blood Sabre Elder did not consider this at the moment, and his opponent’s technique of self-defense was merely a result of extremely well-practised swordplay. He thought: “Hmph, little fellow. Let us compete. Let’s see who’s faster?” And with that he increased the speed of his attacks.

The others wanted to jump in to assist to kill the Blood Sabre Elder, but the speed of the two fighters was much too fast, how could they find an opening to attack?



Shui Sheng was worried for her cousin's safety. Her arms became sour and her legs became numb. She could not wait any longer. From a nearby corpse she grabbed a long sword and rushed forward to attack. Whenever she and her cousin would join forces against an opponent, their attacks were coordinated very well. Wang Xiaofeng focused on obstructing the Blood Sabre Elder's attacks while Shui Sheng aimed to attack her opponent's vital areas.

As the Blood Sabre Elder could not defeat Wang Xiaofeng in several dozen stances he became impatient. Suddenly, he let out a huge roar and with his right hand he brandished his blood sabre and with his left hand he grabbed his long sword. Wang Xiaofeng was startled and increased the speed of his attacks, hoping to sever his fingers. But he did not expect that the Blood Sabre Elder's left hand was not afraid of his sword and even managed to reduce more than half of his sword stances. At this point, Wang Xiaofeng and Shui Sheng were surrounded by perils.

One of the old men amongst the remaining fighters saw that things turned for the worse and knew that tonight the Twin Knights of Bell Sword would lose their lives. Under the assumption that they would all die today, he shouted in desperation: "Everyone, we will fight together to defeat this evil monk!"

Suddenly, from the northwest direction a shout could be heard: "Luo—hua liushui!" Then from the northeast direction someone shouted: "Luohua—Liushui!" The two words "luo hua" was not finished when from the southwest direction another voice said: "Luohua Liu—Shui!" These three people came from three different directions, their voices were loud and profound and melodious; each tone was different, but it was full of energy and one could tell that they had profound internal energy.

The Blood Sabre Elder was startled. "Where did these three experts come from? Judging by their voices, the martial arts of each individual are not below mine. If the three of them fight together, it would be difficult to handle." He tried to come up with a plan to meet the attack while his sabre stances did not slow down in the least bit.

All of a sudden, another voice was heard from the southern direction, shouting: "Luohua Liushui—" The sound of the "shui" character was extended and relentlessly traveled to their direction like the expanse of the Yangtze. This voice was closer than that of the other three.

Shui Sheng was delighted. "Daddy! Daddy! Come here quickly!"

All the fighters in the group were delighted and shouted: "The Four Elders of Jiangnan are here! Luohua Liushui!" Ha—" They could only utter a "ha" when they were immediately cut down by the blood sabre, fresh blood spurting from their stomachs.

The Blood Sabre Elder heard as another person was approaching and it was Shui Sheng's father. He suddenly recalled: "My disciple Shan Yong once told me of the greatest martial artists in the Central Plains. Apart from Ding Dian, there is what is known as the Four Marvels of the South and the Four Freaks of the North. The Four Freaks of the North are called 'Fenghu Yunlong'<sup>2</sup> while the Four Marvels of the South are called 'Luohua Liushui'. At that time when I heard this I told him to get lost; a nickname of 'Luohua Liushui', how can they have any sort of decent background? But now that I hear the echoes of their voices, it seems that they do have a bit of tricks up their sleeves."

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<sup>2</sup> 風虎云龍, literally Wind Tiger Cloud Dragon.

He did not come to a decision yet when the four men from the distant all yelled out “Luohua Liushui!” from all four directions, the vibration of their sounds echoed in the valley. The Blood Sabre Elder heard that these four voices were some distance apart from each other, the furthest one within a distance of five li. If he were to finish off the remaining fighters and the four of them team up against him, it would be very hard for him to escape. He thrust his lips and whistled: “Luohua Liushui, I will kill you until you are Luohua Liushui!”<sup>3</sup> With a flick of his finger he aimed for Shui Sheng’s sword. She could not keep a good hold of her sword and it was flicked out of her hands and cast into the distance.

The Blood Sabre Elder ordered: “Di Yun, get ready to mount the horse. We have to get out of here.”

Di Yun could not immediately comply with his demand. He felt a sense of difficulty in his heart. If he were to escape with him, he would be digging an even deeper hole for himself of never being able to prove his innocence. Yet if he remained here, he would most certainly be killed without so much as a chance to explain himself.

He heard the Blood Sabre Elder call out again: “Grand-disciple, get on the horse!”

Di Yun began to have second thoughts. He reasoned: “The most important thing is to preserve my life. Have I not been falsely accused enough times in my life already? Why should I still care what others think of me?” By the time the Blood Sabre spoke out the third time, he agreed at once. He picked up a short spear on the ground and used it as a crutch and made his way to the horses by the tree.

A club-wielding fat person yelled: “Oh no! The evil monk wants to run away. I will go and chase him.” He lifted his club and rushed forward to attack Di Yun.

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed at his remark. “Hah, if you chase after him, I will chase after you!” With a swipe of the blood sabre, along with the club, the fat person was sliced into four pieces. The others saw how violently this person died and cried out in terror. The truth was that the Blood Sabre Elder wanted to take the opportunity to scare away the remaining fighters. He extended his arms and carried Shui Sheng and ran to the direction of Di Yun.

Shui Sheng shouted: “Evil monk, let go of me!” She began pounding his back with her fist. Although her sword techniques weren’t bad, her fists were powerless, and furthermore, the Blood Sabre Elder was a man of strong build, so he hardly felt her attacks. With one stride of his legs he could cross a distance of five feet. In no time at all he was beside Di Yun.

When Wang Xiaofeng executed the nine stances of “Peacock Spreads its Tails” in a daze, he could not immediately withdraw his attack, and executed the stances of “Brocade Feather Spreads East”, “Jade Feathers Pick West”, “Colorful Sun Sets South”, and “Morning Wind Returns North” in succession. When he saw Shui Sheng being carried away, he scurried forward, the long sword in his hand remained brandished relentlessly.

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<sup>3</sup> A play on words, the original text, 落花流水, when translated means “to be utterly defeated”. So he is mocking them by saying he would beat them until they are utterly defeated.

The Blood Sabre Elder set Di Yun on top of the yellow horse and put Shui Sheng in front of him. He whispered: "Whatever these four devils are called, they are formidable opponents and can't be taken lightly. This little girl is our hostage, you cannot let her get away." As he said this he got on the white horse and rode east.

The sounds of the men chanting "Luohua Liushui" drew closer and closer, sometimes it was chanted by one person, while sometime two or three or four chanted altogether.

Shui Sheng yelled: "Biaoge! Biaoge! Daddy! Daddy! Save me!" However, she could only watch as her cousin once again trailed behind the horse. The yellow horse and white horse of the Twin Knights of Bell Sword were prized steeds picked from Dayuan amongst thousands of horses. During peaceful times the two of them were arrogant, always bragging about how the speed and strength of their two steeds could not be matched by a third horse in this world. Who would have thought that these horses would now be used by their enemies? These creatures were ignorant and could only gallop forward. The faster the horses were, the farther Wang Xiaofeng trailed behind.

Wang Xiaofeng saw that he could not catch up to the horse, he could only yell out, "Biaomei! Biaomei!"

One shouted "Biaoge!" while the other shouted "Biaomei!" their voices filled with immense sorrow. When Di Yun heard of this tragedy, he could not bear to keep Shui Sheng on the horse and wanted to knock her off, but upon recalling the Blood Sabre Elder's words of "These opponents are formidable and cannot be taken lightly. This girl is our hostage, you must not let her get away" he knew that if he released Shui Sheng, the Blood Sabre Elder would be extremely furious. This monk was incredibly vicious and ruthless, for him to kill someone would be no different than slaughtering a chicken. He further knew that should Shui Sheng's father and the other heroes catch up, he would lose his life for sure.

He hesitated and did not know how to act. Upon hearing Shui Sheng's sad voice calling for her cousin, his heart became sour. "The two of them are deeply in love, yet they were separated by force. Yet me and my martial sister... sigh, me and my martial sister, did we not suffer the same fate? However, the way she treats me, can it be compared with the way Lady Shui treats her cousin?" As he thought up to this point, he grieved deeply and thought, "Go then!" and pushed her off the horse.

Even though the Blood Sabre Elder was focused on running away, he still paid attention for any activity behind him. When he no longer heard the cries of Shui Sheng, followed by an "Aiyo!" as she fell on the floor, he knew that since Di Yun had a broken leg, he could not keep good hold of her, and immediately turned the horse around.

Shui Sheng fell on the ground, but immediately jumped up and continued running towards Wang Xiaofeng. The two of them were separated a distance of over five hundred feet; one was travelling from west to east while the other was heading east to west and they drew closer together. As they ran, one yelled out "Biaoge!" while the other yelled out "Biaomei!" It was truly a sight of happiness that could not be described.

The Blood Sabre Elder smiled faintly and reined the horse after her. He saw Wang Xiaofeng and Shui Sheng were now only separated by a distance of about two hundred feet and increased his pace.

Di Yun was startled and prayed: “Run faster! Run faster!” The remaining fighters all shouted, “Run faster! Run faster!” as they saw the Blood Sabre Elder chasing after her, sabre in mouth.

Shui Sheng heard as the sound of horseshoes drew closer. The two of them ran as fast as they could and the distance between her and Wang Xiaofeng was ever closer. She ran so fast she felt that her heart was about to explode; her knees were bent and weak and felt as if she would slip at any time, but she managed to endure and continued to run.

All of a sudden, she felt the breath of the white horse right behind her, and she heard the Blood Sabre Elder sneer: “You think you can get away?” Shui Sheng extended her hands forward to grab Wang Xiaofeng. The two were within a distance of twenty feet when the Blood Sabre Elder grabbed her by the shoulder.

She cried out in alarm and could not hold the tears in her eyes, when all of a sudden a familiar and affectionate voice called out: “Sheng’er, don’t be scared! Daddy is here for you!”

When Shui Sheng heard this, she knew that her father had arrived. She was so delighted that her spirits abruptly increased and she gathered up the strength in her legs and with all her might, she leapt forward several dozen feet. Originally, the Blood Sabre Elder had already caught her by the shoulder, but unexpectedly, she got away. Wang Xiaofeng pushed forward and the two of them held their left hands together. He thought: “Heaven has pity, teacher arrived just in the nick of time, we no longer need to be afraid of this evil monk.”

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed coldly and unleashed his blood sabre. Wang Xiaofeng hurriedly rushed forward to block with his own sword, but all he could see was a sparkling red flash heading towards him and making a turn. It followed the momentum from the edge of his sword and slashed downwards, the tip of the sabre aiming towards his fingers. Had Wang Xiaofeng not immediately released his sword, his hand would have been crippled immediately. This move was incredibly fast; his palm stuttered as the long sword flew out of his hands toward his opponent.

The Blood Sabre Elder flicked the sword westward with his left finger. The sword pierced in the direction of one of the old fighters. With the blood sabre on his right hand, he rushed forward to chop down Wang Xiaofeng. Wang Xiaofeng had no choice but to release his hold on Shui Sheng in order to avoid the attack. The Blood Sabre Elder’s left arm made a turn and in one fell swoop he once again grabbed Shui Sheng and put her on the saddle. He did not bother to turn the direction of his horse and rushed forward to attack the other fighters at the scene.

The remaining fighters who watched him rush forward all yelled out at once and split to two sides. The Blood Sabre Elder laughed as he cut one of them down, then circled once with his horse and rushed towards Di Yun.

All of a sudden, a grey flash approached from the left, the long sword reflected by the dazzling moonlight, a cold and threatening sword flash heading to his chest. The Blood Sabre Elder countered with his own sabre. The two weapons clashed and vibrated violently, the web between his thumb and forefinger felt slightly numb. The Blood Sabre Elder thought: “Very profound internal energy!” At this time, another long sword approached from the right. The stance was somewhat unusual; the tip of the sword rotated in a circular motion and he could not see clearly which direction his opponent intended to strike. The Blood Sabre Elder was startled as he thought: “The renowned Taiji Sword practitioner is here.”

Channelling energy to his right arm, the Blood Sabre Elder too brandished his sabre in a circular motion. The two weapons clashed. Ting! Ting Ting! Ting Ting Ting! The weapons sparked upon contact, splashing in all directions. His opponent complimented: "Excellent sabre techniques!"

The Blood Sabre Elder looked to the side and saw a Taoist dressed in a yellow gown and replied: "Your swordplay is remarkable as well!"

The person on the left hand side shouted: "Let go of my daughter!" On one hand he stroke out with his sword while with the other he attacked with a palm, two forces unleashed simultaneously.

From afar, Di Yun saw that the Blood Sabre Elder had held Shui Sheng captive once again and was now being attacked on both sides. The man on the left hand side was old and majestic, his appearance slivery white, giving off an elegant and delicate appearance. This man said "Let go of my daughter!" so naturally he must be Shui Sheng's father. He saw that every time the Blood Sabre Elder blocked a stance, his body would tremble slightly, which suggested that his internal energy was slightly inferior. Di Yun saw another two men were approaching up the hill. Their movements were quick as the wind, obviously extremely powerful fighters. Di Yun thought: "Once the other two arrive as reinforcements and the four of them attack at once, there is no way the Blood Sabre Elder can handle it, he will most certainly die. I should run for my life while I still can." But he reconsidered: "If not for him, I would have died by the sword of Wang Xiaofeng a long time ago. For me to only care about myself would be being ungrateful; a much shameless and despicable act."

The Blood Sabre Elder shouted, "Take your daughter back!" and threw Shui Sheng high up in the sky over Shui Dai's head, then rushed to Di Yun.

This move came as a surprise to everyone. High up in the air, Shui Sheng cried out in alarm and the onlookers all exclaimed at once.

Di Yun saw as Shui Sheng flew towards his direction, the momentum strong and swift. If he did not support her, she would most likely fall on the ground and sustain injuries, so he opened his arms to catch her. The force of the fall was quite strong. Fortunately, Di Yun was still on the horse and a good portion of the force was alleviated by the horse. When the Blood Sabre Elder threw Shui Sheng, he had already sealed her acupoint, so all she could do was cry out in alarm without any way to retaliate. She yelled: "Little monk, let go of me!"

The Blood Sabre Elder attacked Shui Dai twice with the sabre, then fiercely attacked the old Taoist with another two strikes of the sabre. These attacks were reckless without any intent of self-defense, it was extremely severe. He shouted: "My good son Di Yun, get away now! You don't have to wait for me!"

Di Yun was at a loss and did not know what to do. He heard as Wang Xiaofeng and the other fighters rushed forward, declaring "Kill the little perverted monk!" while the Blood Sabre Elder shouted again: "Run away! Run away!" Immediately, he reined the horse and rushed outward. Originally, the Blood Sabre Elder and he intended to head east, but under such extreme urgency he had no time to think and headed west instead.

The sword of the Blood Sabre Elder increased in speed the more he attacked, circular movements of red flashes enveloped around his body. He laughed: "I have to spend time with your good daughter now, not an old fellow like you!" He soared into the air and landed squarely on the white horse.

Shui Dai was anxious to save his daughter and was unwilling to tangle with him. At once, he executed the lightness martial arts "Rising Duckweed Passes through the Water". His body felt as if it was floating on water, rushing rapidly towards Di Yun. However, the horse Di Yun was riding was a remarkable steed purchased that he had purchased for five hundred taels of silver many years ago; the speed of the horse was unmatched. Apart from the white horse that the Blood Sabre Elder was currently riding, in the present age there is unlikely to be a horse which could compete. Even though there were two riders on the yellow horse, Shui Dai could still not overtake them.

Shui Dai shouted: "Stop! Stop!" Although the horse recognized his voice, Di Yun had a strong hold on its reins and it could not stop easily. Shui Dai declared: "Vicious little monk, if you do not get off this horse, this old man will cut you into 17 or 18 pieces!"

Shui Sheng yelled out: "Daddy! Daddy!"

Shui Dai felt the pain in his heart as if it was being cut apart, he yelled: "My child, don't be scared!"

In an instant, Shui Dai had chased the horse for over a li. Although Shui Dai's lightness martial arts were impressive, he was after all getting old and did not have as much stamina. The yellow horse ran farther and farther away from him. Suddenly, a shout was heard, a blade striking him from behind. He flipped his hand over to counter the Blood Sabre Elder's attack with his sword. A gust of wind swept past him; the Blood Sabre Elder laughed heartily as the white horse galloped into the distance.

The Blood Sabre Elder and Di Yun ran for a good while. When the Blood Sabre Elder saw that they were much too far away for their enemies to catch up, he was afraid of overworking the horse and ordered Di Yun to hold its reins and walk slowly. He could not find the words to praise Di Yun's good conscience. He knew that the situation was critical yet Di Yun did not leave him behind.

Di Yun smiled bitterly and gave a sideways glance at Shui Sheng. He saw that her expression was filled with fear and hatred and knew that she loathed him greatly. He decided that he would never be able to explain himself at this point, so he thought: "You can think whatever you want. Call me a vicious and perverted monk. Curse me to your heart's content."

The Blood Sabre Elder said: "Hey, little girl, your father's martial arts is really not bad. Hehe, but your grandfather I have scored a victory over him. He exerted all his strength but still could not catch me." Shui Sheng glared at him in contempt but did not reply. The Blood Sabre Elder continued: "Who is the one who uses a sword? Which member of 'Luohua Liushui' is he?" Shui Sheng decided that no matter what he asked, she would not pay any attention.

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: "My grand-disciple, what is the most valuable asset of a woman?"

Di Yun was taken aback by his question and his heart skipped a beat. He thought: "Oh no! The old monk wants to tarnish the lady's purity? How can I save her?" He replied: "I don't know."

The Blood Sabre Elder said: "The most valuable asset of a woman is her face. Since this little girl won't talk to me, I will cut across her face horizontally seven times and slash vertically eight times. This technique has a name, it is called 'Seven Horizontals and Eight Verticals'. Hehe, don't you think it's great?" As he said up to this point, he pulled out the blood sabre from his waist and held it firmly in his hands.

Shui Sheng had long cast away her life. She no longer harboured any hope of returning alive, but the thought of her faultless face being disfigured by the monk sent shivers down her spine. But she thought that if she were to be disfigured, she would likely be able to keep her purity, which could be considered a fortunate event amongst unfortunate events.

The Blood Sabre Elder flashed the sabre beside her face a few times and threatened: "I ask you: Who is that old Taoist? If you don't answer me now, I will slash you across the face! Answer me!"

Shui Sheng spat in disgust and said: "Just kill me!"

The Blood Sabre Elder slashed with his right hand, a flicker of red light flashed in front of her as it swiped down her face.

Di Yun let out an "Ah!" and turned his head around, not daring to look. Shui Sheng passed out immediately. The Blood Sabre Elder burst into laughter and urged his horse forward. Di Yun could not help but turn around to look at Shui Sheng. He saw that her face was unaffected without a single scar and was delighted. He knew that the Blood Sabre Elder's sabre techniques had reached the stage of being able to do whatever he pleased with the precision of a thousandth of a point. The edge of the sabre barely grazed her cheeks and only managed to cut off very miniscule strands of hair on her temple, her skin was unaffected.

Shui Sheng eventually woke up, tears dropping out of her eyes. When she saw Di Yun's smile, she became even more furious and scolded: "You... you take joy in calamity and delight in disaster... you... you are really an evil person." She had originally intended to scold him with a much harsher phrase, but she was not used uttering profanities so she could not immediately come up with something malicious to curse."

The Blood Sabre Elder raised his sabre again and said: "If you don't answer, I will slash you again."

Shui Sheng decided that since she had already been slashed once, it would not make a difference even if she was slashed a few more times, and replied: "Just kill me now! Kill me now!"

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed maliciously. "Do you think it's that easy?" As he said this he swiped the blood sabre across her face once again.

This time Shui Sheng did not pass out. She felt the sabre sweep across her face yet she did not feel any pain, nor was there any blood dripping from her wound. She realized that the monk only meant to scare her and that her face remained intact. She rejoiced and exhaled a breath of relief.

The Blood Sabre Elder said: "My clever grand-disciple, what do you think of your grandfather's two strikes?"

Di Yun replied: “Your sabre technique is extremely profound, truly impressive!” He really meant this from the bottom of his heart.

The Blood Sabre Elder asked: “Do you want to learn it?”

Di Yun thought: “Just when I could not come up with a way to protect the girl’s chastity.... if I learn the techniques of this old monk, as long as he teaches me without any malicious intentions, I may be able to save her. But to do this I must get on his good side.” He replied: “Your grand-disciple shows utmost respect for your sabre techniques. If you teach me several stances, in the future, if I encounter petty foes like her cousin, I will not be bullied, so as to prevent grandfather’s reputation from being tarnished.” In his whole life he had hardly told a lie, but at this point in order to save the girl, he could not help but feel corny and his face flushed red when he called him “grandfather”.

Shui Sheng scolded: “Bah! Have you no face? You are shameless!”

The Blood Sabre Elder was delighted and laughed: “My profound blood sabre techniques cannot be learned in such a short time. Very well, I will begin by teaching you the stance of ‘Slicing Paper, Scraping Tofu’. When you practice, find one hundred pieces of tissue and fold it into a group and put it on the table. Slash horizontally across the pile, slicing the first piece of paper without moving the second. Then slice the second piece of paper without moving the third. Continue to do this until you finish all 100 pieces.”

As Shui Sheng was still a brash youngster, she could not help but interrupt and scoffed: “Yeah right!”

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: “You think I’m bluffing? We can try it for ourselves.” He reached for her head and pulled out a strand of hair.

Shui Sheng felt a slight pain and asked: “What are you doing?”

The Blood Sabre Elder ignored her and placed the strand of her on the tip of her nose and began reining the horse. The acceleration caused Shui Sheng’s body to curl up and recline in front of Di Yun’s horse. She felt a slight tickle as the strand of hair was placed on her nose. She did not know what he was trying to do, and was about to open her mouth to blow away the hair when the Blood Sabre Elder said: “Don’t move! Watch carefully!” He reined the horse and turned it back around, the horse slightly rubbed against the other horse as it passed through.

Shui Sheng saw a flash of red light and her nose felt a slight cool sensation, following which the strand of hair placed on her nose disappeared. Then she heard Di Yun exclaim: “Amazing! Amazing!” The Blood Sabre Elder extended his blood sabre and she saw the strand of hair placed firmly on the edge of the blade. Both the Blood Sabre Elder and Di Yun were bald, so this strand of hair definitely belonged to her.

Shui Sheng felt both startled and impressed by this display of brilliancy. She thought: “This old monk’s martial arts is really impressive. Had his sabre been raised higher by even half an inch, the strand of hair would not have been sliced from my nose. If the sabre was lower by half an inch, then my entire nose would have been cut off. Furthermore he was riding a horse, which makes his feat is over a hundred times more impressive than simply practicing on a stationary target.”



Di Yun intended to get on the Blood Sabre Elder's good side and wanted to utter words of flattery, but he was clumsy and slow with words. He tossed and turned and could only say: "Your sabre technique is very good! I have never seen something as impressive before." Shui Sheng had personally witnessed the technique of the Blood Sabre Elder, and even upon hearing the compliments of Di Yun, she did not feel it was excessive. However, she thought that since he was quite despicable for stooping to such low levels of flattery only to get on his grand-teacher's good side.

The Blood Sabre Elder turned his horse around toward Di Yun and said: "As for the part about 'Scraping Tofu', you must place a piece of tofu on top of a wooden board and scrape it into thin pieces with your sabre. A two inch long tofu must be scraped into 20 equal pieces, each piece completely intact. If you can do this, then you have successfully completed the preliminaries."

Di Yun said: "That is only the preliminaries?"

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: "Of course! Think about it, what is harder: to slice a piece of stable and stationary tofu, or to slice off a strand of hair on the girl's nose while galloping on your horse?"

Di Yun flattered: "Grand-teacher is naturally gifted, such a feat cannot be replicated by the average person. If your grand-disciple I can learn even a tenth of your skills, I would be completely satisfied!"

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed out loud while Shui Sheng scolded: "Fulsome! Despicable!"

At first, it was not easy for an honest person like Di Yun to give such excessive compliments of flattery, but once the first phrase was uttered, the rest followed naturally. However, the Blood Sabre Elder did indeed possess martial arts abilities that could not be matched by the ordinary person, so these compliments were not necessarily false. It's just that Di Yun was naturally not the type of person to say these kinds of things.

The Blood Sabre Elder said: "Your martial arts aptitude is not low. If you put in the effort, you can definitely complete this. Well then, give it a shot!" As he said this he pulled another piece of hair from Shui Sheng and placed it on top of her nose.

Shui Sheng was startled and immediately blew away the piece of hair. She complained: "This little monk does not even know the technique, how can you simply let him try?"

The Blood Sabre Elder said: "If he does not practice, how will he learn it? If he does not get it the first time, he will try it a second time. If he does not succeed the second time, then he will try ten times!" As he said this, he pulled out yet another piece of hair and placed it on top of her nose and passed the blood sabre to Di Yun, saying: "Give it a try!"

Di Yun took the blood sabre and give a glance at Shui Sheng, her face full of resentment and her eyes full of fear. She knew that Di Yun had never practiced this type of sabre technique. If he were to attempt to replicate what the Blood Sabre Elder did, the best case scenario would be that her nose would be sliced off; in the worst case scenario, her entire head would be sliced in half. She thought: "Maybe this is not so bad. Just let the vicious little monk kill me, it is much better than having to suffer their humiliations." She held on to this thought and no longer feared her impending death.

Di Yun did not dare to strike so rashly, so he asked: “Grand-teacher, how much energy do I need to use for this attack?”

The Blood Sabre Elder answered: “The lower back channels energy to the shoulder and the shoulder channels energy to the arm. Your arm must be without energy and your wrist must be without strength.” Then he explained what he meant by “the lower back channels energy to the shoulder”, and how “the waist channels energy to the arm”. Then he fetched the blood sabre and demonstrated what he means by “overcoming power without power” and “exuding strength without strength”. As Shui Sheng listened to his profound martial arts philosophy, she could not help but nod in approval.

Di Yun listened attentively and nodded repeatedly. Then he said: “Unfortunately, your grand-disciple I was wronged in the past, my scapula was pierced and my tendons have been severed. I cannot exert any strength in my arms.”

The Blood Sabre Elder asked: “Why was your scapula pierced? How are the tendons in your arm severed?”

Di Yun replied: “Your grand-disciple I suffered many injustices during my time in prison.”

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed heartily; their horses next to each other. He asked Di Yun to undo his shirt and expose his shoulder. Indeed, he saw that Di Yun’s shoulder was subsided, his scapula on both sides had a hole pierced through by an iron chain. The wound did not close yet and furthermore, all the fingers on his right hand were sliced off and the tendons in his arm were cut off. In terms of effectiveness in practicing martial arts, it could be said that he was useless. And even more, his leg had been trampled over by a horse, although it did not wound him internally. The Blood Sabre Elder could not help but laugh at the sight of this. Di Yun thought: “I have suffered so much, yet you still find a way to be amused.”

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: “Gee, how many women did you harass? Haha. Little child was horny and luscious without a care for his own well-being and failed in one of his attempts, am I right?”

Di Yun replied, “No.”

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: “Be honest now! The reason you were in prison was because of women doing you injustice, am I right?”

Di Yun was stumped for words but he thought: “I was framed by the concubine of Wan Zhenshan who said I stole money and wanted to kidnap her, so it is indeed true that women caused me injustice.” He clenched his teeth and angrily replied: “Correct. This bitch caused me so much pain. The day will come when I take my revenge.”

Shui Sheng could not help but scold: “You have done so many terrible deeds yet you say other people implicate you. Of all the shameless people in this world, you... you little monk must rank at the top.”

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: “You wanted to call him a ‘little horny monk’ but you could not utter the word ‘horny’, am I right? This little doll has some nerve. My child, why don’t you strip off

all her clothes and expose her completely? We will show her how 'horny' we really are, let's see if she ever dares to insult us again?" Di Yun could only vaguely agree to his demand.

Shui Sheng scolded: "Little thief! Do you dare?" At this moment she could not move a single muscle in her body. If Di Yun really did what the Blood Sabre Elder asked him to, how could she get away? The words "you dare" were uttered as a desperate attempt to intimidate him.

Di Yun watched as the Blood Sabre Elder gave a dirty laugh while he stared at Shui Sheng constantly. He thought: "How can I make him change his mind about harassing the girl?" Then he asked: "Grand-teacher, your grand-disciple I am completely crippled, how can I still practice martial arts?"

The Blood Sabre Elder said: "How is it not possible? Even if both your legs and arms were crippled, you can still practice the techniques of my Blood Sabre Clan."

Di Yun replied: "That is good to hear!" He said this with utmost sincerity and joyousness.

The two of them discussed together and eventually rode their way to a large road. Suddenly, the sound of gongs could be heard followed by an entire band of instruments; a group of escorts for a bride was heading their direction. There were about 40 or 50 people in total surrounding a marriage sedan. Behind the sedan a man was draped in red silk with flowers, appearing fresh and bright. That person was the groom and he was riding a white horse.

Di Yun pushed his horse to the side to make way. He was worried that they would all be killed by the Blood Sabre Elder. The majority yelled: "Hey! Get out of the way! What are you doing? Stinking monk, this is a happy occasion, if you don't move away, would you not be wishing bad luck upon us?"

The Blood Sabre Elder rushed forward and stopped 20 feet in front of the escorts. He pushed against his waist with both hands and asked: "Hey, that bride of yours, is she pretty?"

From the group of escorts emerged a large person who fetched a pole from the sedan and declared: "You bald bastard, are you tired of living?" This pole was even thicker than his arm and was over 10 feet long. The man held it sideways with both hands and demonstrated impressive power.

The Blood Sabre Elder looked at Di Yun and said: "Look closely at this technique." Then he moved forward and unleashed his blood sabre which slithered like a serpent and went past the sedan pole, then he put the sword back in its sheath and laughed.

Amongst the bride escorts one yelled out: "You old bald thief! Are you blind? Now's not the time for your prayers!" This person did not even finish reprimanding him when the big man approached and, with sedan pole in hand, let out an alarming scream. Cracking sounds were heard in succession; the sedan pole was cracked in half and fell on the ground. What he held in his hand was only two pieces of several inch thick wooden block. It turns out that in that instant when the Blood Sabre Elder attacked, the ten feet long sedan pole was already sliced into more than a dozen pieces.

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed out loud and unsheathed his blood sabre once again. Immediately, he rushed forward and cut the large man into four pieces and declared: "You should feel honoured to let me take a look at the bride. Why are you so worried?"

When everyone saw how vicious this man was in broad daylight, they were completely terror-stricken. The braver ones shouted back before running away. More than half of them felt their legs tremble as they dispersed in four directions. Some people were so scared that they pissed or shit themselves on the spot without even moving.

The Blood Sabre Elder swung his blood sabre and cut down the curtains in the front of the marriage sedan. He grabbed the bride by the chest with his left hand and pulled her out. The bride screamed and yelled for help but could not struggle free. The Blood Sabre Elder raised his sabre and pricked in front of her face. The bride was so frightened she turned ghostly pale. When he saw that this bride was only 16 or 17 years old with an ugly appearance and the figure of a child, he spat out in disgust on her body and yelled: "Such a clown of a girl, how dare you become a bride!"

Di Yun had acted the role of the blood sabre monk all along, firstly because he was afraid, and secondly because this old monk did save his life so he was grateful. But when he saw how he could be so vicious even against people he had never met before, he felt resentful and angry. He shouted: "You... you... how can you wilfully slaughter the innocent like this? What have they ever done to you?"

The Blood Sabre Elder turned his head and laughed: "I have always loved slaughtering innocents. If only the guilty can be killed, how many people are guilty in this world?" As he said this, he raised his sabre and with one slash, splattered the brains of another escort.

Di Yun rushed forward with his horse and demanded: "You... you must not kill anymore."

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: "Little child, you are afraid of seeing blood aren't you? Then what use are you?"

At this precise moment, sounds of approaching horses could be heard; over a few dozen people were approaching from afar. One shouted: "Blood sabre monk, let go of my daughter and we will let the matter drop, else even if you escape to the remotest of places, I will chase you to the ends of the earth!"

The sounds of horses were still somewhat distant, yet Shui Dai's voice was clear and distinct. Shui Sheng was delighted and yelled, "Father is here!"

Another four people were heard chanting at once: "Luohua Liushui! Ah—Shuiliu Hualuo! Luohua Liushui! Ah—Shuilui Hualuo!" The voice of each person was distinct; somewhat old but powerful and majestic. The sounds were drawn out and reverberated through the air. In terms of internal energy, they were each profound in their own way.

The Blood Sabre Elder creased his eyebrows and yelled: "Bastards of the Central Plains, trying to overwhelm me with the majority!"

He heard Shui Dai reply: "Even if your martial arts were higher, it would be a disaster to face the Four Marvels of the South 'Luohua Liushui' at the same time. Let go of my daughter. An honourable man is true to his word, I will not pursue you."

The Blood Sabre Elder contemplated: "I had just witnessed the martial arts of Shui Dai and that old Taoist. In a one-on-one battle, I do not have to fear. If they attack two-on-one, I will lose most the

time and have no choice but to escape. If they attack three-on-one, I will lose miserably without even a chance to escape. If all four of them attack, I will die without a burial site. Haha, these bastards of the Central Plains, how can their words be trusted? If I keep this little doll with me as hostage I would still have some leverage, but if I let her go, they will have complete control of the situation!" At once he whipped Di Yun's horse to speed westward. He gathered his internal energy and yelled out: "Old Shui, two monks of the Blood Sabre Clan have become your son-in-law. The fourth generation clan leader has become your son-in-law, and the sixth generation disciple is your son-in-law as well. The father-in-law chases the son-in-law. Excellent! Excellent!"

As soon as Shui Dai heard this, he felt as if his heart was about to explode of anger. He already knew that the vicious monks of the Blood Sabre Clan were notorious for committing adultery and arson and murder. With the two monks together with her daughter, not even considering the possibility that what the Blood Sabre Elder said was true, even if it was a hoax he would still be overwhelmed with vast and limitless obscenities. For the daughter of a renowned hero of the Central Plains of several dozen years to suffer such a fate, if he did not swear to slash the two blood sabre monks into ten thousand pieces, how could he ever have any face again? He immediately pursued with his horse.

At this point, besides the three elders Lu, Hua, and Liu who shared the name of the 'Four Marvels of the South' with him, there were additionally another 30 or so fighters consisting of experts, constables, or fighters of various societies. In recent times, the many vicious monks of the Blood Sabre Clan had turned the heaven and earth upside down with their deeds; without even a care to separate right from wrong, they offended members of both righteous and criminal societies. When the various martial artists of the martial world were notified, they were outraged and acted as reinforcements, not only to help Shui Dai rescue his daughter, but also to kill the two vicious monks of the Blood Sabre Clan. There was no one in the martial world who did not detest these blood sabre monks.

The majority journeyed together to chase after the monks. Whenever they reached a small town they would switch horses and continue pursuit. They ate and drank while riding and pursued in great haste. Although the Blood Sabre Elder tried to act leisurely, sitting on the horse in high spirits, they would only stop by a restaurant to replenish themselves and take a short rest, they did not dare to spend the night. Because the various fighters of the martial world were in hot pursuit, Shui Sheng managed to retain her chastity over the days.

After many days, they had pursued from Hubei to the borders of Sichuan. The martial artists of Lianghu and Bashu had always been on good terms, so when they received the news, they joined the pursuit as well. When they reached the area of Yu Province, the heroes in that area, although were not personally involved in this affair, decided that the battle was a guaranteed victory and decided to get in on the action to meet new friends as well as to look honourable and brave. By the time they crossed Yu Province, there were at least two or three hundred people chasing them. The martial artists of Sichuan were wealthy and had large quantities of horses and supplied the majority with rations. However, by the time these martial artists received the news, the Blood Sabre Elder, along with Di Yun and Shui Sheng, had already headed westward and they could not intercept in time.

When the martial artists of West Sichuan heard that the monks passed through, they expressed their sympathies to the majority and sighed: "If we knew this beforehand, we would have

obstructed their path and not let those two perverted monks escape at any cost, as well as rescue Lady Shui.”

Shui Dai expressed his thanks but in his heart he resented: “What’s the use of speaking this trash? Judging by your capabilities, do you honestly think you can stop the two monks?”

By now, the chase had lasted over 20 days. Several times, the Blood Sabre Elder had to change his path to cast away his pursuers, but from amongst the majority there was a horse thief from Guandong who was adept at pursuit. No matter where the Blood Sabre Elder twisted and turned, he would still be able to follow relentlessly. However, because the Blood Sabre Elder kept changing his course, the majority was reduced as they branched off in different directions. Furthermore, he had reached the ranges of Mount Chong in Western Sichuan. The majority knew that the Blood Sabre Elder was planning to return to his home in Qinghai. Should he be successful, there would be many blood sabre monks compounded by a clique of traitors and obscene friends, their power would be quite formidable. If that were to happen, even if the warriors of the Central Plains battled against them, it would be a case of the fierce dragon being unable to overcome the local serpent, the outcome of the battle would be indecisive.

After another two days it suddenly started to snow. At this time they had reached the border area of Western Sichuan and continued to travel west towards Qinghai. This location was in the range of the Bayankala Mountains, the terrain was high and steep and the ice and snow caused the roads to be slippery and wet. The cold was felt to the bone and even breathing proved to be difficult. Unless one had especially high internal energy, one would feel weary all over and would have no choice but to rest for several hours.

However, the majority that chased after them could all be considered formidable people who had made a name for themselves. No one dared to show any signs of weakness for fear of ruining their reputation. Nonetheless, in the past few days the majority had been reduced greatly, with many suggesting that they abandon the pursuit altogether. Over half of the group had returned home, especially members from Eastern Sichuan and Central Sichuan, there were also some honourable and strong men from wealthy families with decent martial arts who could endure the suffering. Others saw that the terrain was dangerous and used that excuse to fall behind. Furthermore, some people simply sneaked out of the majority and ran home.

One mid-afternoon, as the majority chased them to a precipitous road by the mountain, they saw a yellow horse lying dead on a pile of snow. It was the yellow horse of Wang Xiaofeng. Shui Dai and Wang Xiaofeng cheered: “The villain has lost one of his horses! If we make haste, the perverted monk won’t be able to escape!” The majority was delighted and inspired by this news and cheered loudly as they pursued. However, amidst their cheers they saw on the mountain peak on the west side a large pile of snow was slowly coming down.

One old man from Western Sichuan shouted: “No good, an avalanche is coming. Everyone get away!” He did not even finish speaking when the distinct thunderous sound of snow rushing down from the mountains gradually increased in volume.

The majority was confused: “What?” “What’s the big deal about an avalanche?” “Everyone get away!” “Faster!” “Faster!” “Let’s cross this mountain ridge first and then talk!”

In a moment, the faint thunderous sounds of snow became rumbling roars deafening to the ear. The majority became scared. At first the avalanche was still quite some distance away and gradually fell from the peak downward. Along the way there was a lot of snow accumulated which hindered their path, the force of the avalanche increased to half the mountain. If the entire mountain were to erupt like a raging tide, the consequences would be unthinkable.

It had long been the case that many people in the group had ran away, but now when they heard the thunderous sounds of an approaching avalanche, it felt as if the sky was about to fall on them, they became so frightened and lost all courage. Many turned their horses and sprinted away. Some horses were so shocked it could not even move, and their riders had no choice but to get off and exercise their lightness martial arts to escape.

However, the speed of the avalanche was much quicker than that of horse or human, in a split second it had already tumbled down the mountain. The ones who were too slow were immediately buried by an ocean of snow and their cries could not even be heard. Even if their martial arts were higher, there would be no chance for them to escape.

The remaining people crossed the hillside and saw that the accumulation of snow caused by the avalanche hindered their path but did not accumulate further. Everyone ran their separate ways dozens of feet before stopping. When they saw the snow was rising like an exploding mountain flash flood or a bursting dam, in a flash the entire mountain path and valley was covered in snow, towering several dozen feet tall, the ground became steep like the mountain peak.

The majority felt blank and discussed amongst themselves and said that the two blood sabre monks were strung through and filled with evil and were likely buried by the avalanche and decided that although it was a happy occasion, they died too easily without punishment for their deeds, and even worse, the flower and jade-like Shui Sheng had to suffer the same fate. There were some people that expressed their sympathy for those who died in the avalanche. However, as the survivors just escaped a natural disaster, their thankfulness and delight greatly exceeded the pain they suffered from the loss of their comrades.

In a panicked state, it was counted that 12 people were missing, including the 'Twin Knights of Bell Sword' Wang Xiaofeng and the four members of 'Luohua Liushui'. Shui Dai cared greatly for his daughter and Wang Xiaofeng missed his lover dearly so naturally they were at the front of the pack in pursuit. The other three marvels followed in account of their friendship with Shui Dai and did not lag behind. It was hard to imagine that despite the peerless martial arts of the Four Marvels of the South, they were buried by the avalanche on the snowy mountain between Sichuan and Qinghai.

The majority sighed and decided it was time to go home. It was agreed that the snow—over a thousand feet tall—would not melt before the summer of next year. If the family members of the deceased wanted to reclaim the corpses, they would have to wait over half a year.

Some people also held onto a thought that they dared not speak out: "The Four Marvels of the South and the Twin Knights of Bell Sword were the most renowned martial artists over many years, strutting around with insufferable arrogance. They deserved to die!"

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The Blood Sabre Elder ran westward with Di Yun and Shui Sheng. Their enemies accumulated but he was not far from his nest in Qinghai. However, as the result of travelling endlessly for days compounded by wind and snow as far as the eye could see and the mountain range was rugged, even if the two horses were more powerful, it would not have done them any good. One day, the yellow horse died on the side of the road and white horse was crippled on one leg and knew that it would soon suffer the same fate as the yellow horse.

The Blood Sabre Elder creased his eyebrows and thought: "I could escape by myself without difficulty, but my grand-disciple is crippled on one leg and cannot move easily. And if I let them take this beautiful doll, that would be such a pity." As he thought up to this point he became enraged and turned around at once. He held Shui Sheng in his arms and wanted to tear off her clothing.

Shui Sheng shouted in alarm: "What... what are you doing?"

The Blood Sabre Elder scolded: "Your daddy I will not take you with me, do you understand?"

Di Yun shouted: "Grand-teacher, our enemies are approaching!"

The Blood Sabre Elder yelled: "Why are you so troublesome?" Suddenly, the sound of a distinct trembling noise could be heard from the top of his head. He looked up and saw that the accumulated snow on the mountain peak was about to fall on them.

The Blood Sabre Elder was from Qinghai and had seen many vicious avalanches in the past. Even if he was ten times more perverted, he would not dare to go against this natural disaster, and shouted: "Let's go! Let's go!" He looked around and saw that only the southern valley had a mountain peak that may not be affected by the avalanche. In such a critical situation, he had no time to think and pulled the white horse towards the southern valley. Even though he was undisciplined and out of control, he too turned pale at the sight of this. The valley on the mountain peak on the side was also accumulated with snow. The snow could not withstand the vibrations and started the avalanche, causing the peaks in all four directions to come down as well.

The Blood Sabre Elder used his lightness martial arts to travel while Di Yun and Shui Sheng travelled on the half-crippled white horse making its way to the valley. At this time, the sound of the avalanche increased in volume. The Blood Sabre Elder looked at the mountain peak on the side and realized that their fate could only be submitted to the will of heaven. There was nothing he could do. If the snow on that mountain peak were to come down as well, then it would be all over.

Then the avalanche came to halt. In only the span of time it took one to drink a cup of tea<sup>4</sup>, the Blood Sabre Elder, Di Yu, and Shui Sheng were deathly pale and stared at each other blankly, their eyes revealing extreme fear. Shui Sheng did not even remember that only a while ago she wanted to kill herself to prevent herself from being humiliated by the monks, she only knew that at this point circumstances were different and she had no choice but to rely on the Blood Sabre Elder and Di Yun for support in order to escape this disaster.

All of a sudden, a small piece of rock slipped down from the mountain peak. Shui Sheng was startled and yelled out in alarm. The Blood Sabre Elder immediately covered her mouth with his left hand

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<sup>4</sup> The time it takes to drink a cup of tea is the time it takes before the tea gets cool, around 10-15 minutes.



and gave her two hard slaps with his right hand. Both cheeks of Shui Sheng were immediately swollen red.

Fortunately, this mountain peak was facing south and was affected the most by sunlight and the snow was not thick. After that piece of rock fell from the peak, there was no more activity and the avalanche gradually halted. The Blood Sabre Elder withdrew his hand from Shui Sheng's mouth and together with Di Yun breathed a sigh of relief. Shui Sheng covered up her face with both hands, not knowing if she should be relieved, angry, or afraid.

The Blood Sabre Elder reached the mouth of the valley and inspected before returning. An angry expression stretched across his face as he sat down on a large piece of rock without saying a word. Di Yun asked: "Grand-teacher, what is the situation outside?"

The Blood Sabre Elder reprimanded: "What? It is all your fault!"

Di Yun did not dare to question him further as he knew that the situation was not good. However, after a long while, he could not help but ask: "Is our enemy guarding the entrance to the valley? Grand-teacher, you don't have to worry about me, you can leave by yourself."

In his whole life, the Blood Sabre Elder associated with treacherous and malicious people. Not only has he never made a friend he sincerely cared for, even his very own disciples like Bao Xiang, Shan Yong, or Sheng Di, who although treated their teacher with utmost respect on the outside, it was nothing but mutual deception. Their relationship consisted of nothing more than personal gain at the expense of others. At this point, when he heard Di Yun tell him to leave by himself, he could not help but feel gratified and revealed a smile on his face. "My good child, you really have a good conscience! It is not the case that our enemies are guarding the entrance, just that the accumulation of snow has sealed the entrance. The snow is several hundred feet high and several thousand feet wide. There's no way we can get out of here before the snow melts next season. And what is there to eat in the valley? How can we survive until spring?"

As Di Yun heard this, he realized that the situation was critical, but at least the most dangerous crisis had already passed, so that was fortunate. He said: "Don't worry, the boat will be straight by the time it reaches the bridge. Even if we starve to death, it is better than being tortured to death by our enemies."

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: "My good child, you speak true words!" Then he fetched the blood sabre from his waist, stood up, and walked towards the white horse.

Shui Sheng was startled and yelled: "Hey, what are you doing?"

The Blood Sabre Elder grinned: "Take a guess."

Obviously, Shui Sheng already knew that he wanted to kill the white horse for food. But the white horse grew up with her and she treated the horse as her best friend, and shouted: "No! No! The horse is mine, you can't eat it."

The Blood Sabre Elder replied: "After I'm done eating the horse, I'll eat you next. Your daddy I can even eat human flesh, what does a horse mean to me?"

Shui Sheng said: "I beg you, please don't hurt my horse." Without any other options, she turned to Di Yun and pleaded: "Please beg him to not kill my horse."

Di Yun could not bear to see her pitiful appearance, but desperate times call for desperate measures, there really is no other choice. After they eat the horse, they will probably have to cook and eat the saddle as well. He was unwilling to look at Shui Sheng and turned his head around.

Shui Sheng cried: "I beg you, please don't kill my horse."

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: "Very well, I won't kill your horse!"

Shui Sheng was delighted and said, "Thank you! Thank you!" But at that same moment she heard the sound of something drop on the ground; the Blood Sabre Elder had already sliced off its head, fresh blood spurting in all directions. Shui Sheng had already become weary after the chase, and now she was so shocked that she passed out.

After a while, she woke up to the aromatic smell of roasted meat. She had been starving for a long time, and her natural instinct was to be delighted that there was food. But as she became more conscious, she remembered that it was her most beloved horse being cooked. As she opened her eyes, she saw Di Yun and the Blood Sabre Monk sitting on top of a rock, each eating away at a large piece of cooked yellow meat. On the side was a fire and on top of a thick firewood dangled a horse leg being roasted on the fire. Shui Sheng was overcome with grief and cried out silently.

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed and asked: "You wanna eat some too?"

Shui Sheng cried: "You two vicious fellows killed my beloved horse. I... I will definitely take my revenge!"

Di Yun felt very apologetic and said: "Lady Shui, there is nothing to eat in this snow valley. If we don't eat the horse, we will starve to death. If you are looking for a good horse, in the future when we get out of this place, you will be able to find one."

Shui Sheng cried: "You are a little vicious monk who pretends to be a good person. You are even worse than the older monk. I hate you. I hate you!"

Di Yun was at a loss for words. If he did not eat the horse he would have suffered starvation. He thought: "You can hate me all you want, but there's no way I'm not eating this horse." As he said this, he opened his mouth and swallowed a piece of horse meat.

As the Blood Sabre Elder chewed on his piece of horse meat, he fixed his gaze on Shui Sheng and said: "The taste is not bad, really not bad. Hey, in a few days when we cook the little doll to eat, she may not be as aromatic as the horse." He thought further: "After I eat the little doll, I will have no choice but to eat my beloved grand-disciple as well. This person is kind-hearted, what a pity. Meh, to save him for last could be considered doing him a favour."

After the two of them finished their horse meat, they added more branches to the fire and slept on the rock. Amidst his dreams, Di Yun heard the continuous sobs and sniffles of Shui Sheng. He felt a slight pain in his heart as he thought: "She cries continuously over the loss of her favourite horse,

yet I am alive in this world and nobody cares about me. When I die, I won't even be able to compare to a beast. Nobody would shed a tear for me."

## Chapter 7 – Luohua Liushui



*Hua Tiegan had intended to kill the Blood Sabre Elder with a single spear strike and executed a stance of "Conquering the Four Barbarians", using his utmost power into this attack. How would he have guessed that the Blood Sabre Elder, in such a critical moment, would decide to jump off a cliff? A loud piercing sound was heard; the tip of the spear had pierced completely through Liu Chengfeng's chest.*

In the middle of the night, Di Yun was suddenly awoken by two taps on the shoulder. The Blood Sabre Elder whispered: "Someone is coming!"

Di Yun was startled but delighted at the same time. He thought: "If someone can come in, that also means we can go out." Then he asked: "Where are they?"

The Blood Sabre Elder pointed south and replied: "Hide over there and don't make any noise. Their martial arts are very powerful." Di Yun listened attentively for anyone approaching but did not hear a sound.

The Blood Sabre Elder held his blood sabre in hand and crouched down, then rushed outside without making a noise. His shadow made a turn on the hillside and disappeared. Di Yun was impressed as he thought: "This person's martial arts is truly impressive. If Brother Ding was still alive, I wonder who would be better?" As he thought about Ding Dian, he felt the package of ashes on his bosom was still fully intact. Although the valley was extremely cold, when his fingers touched the package of ashes he felt a warm sensation inside.

In the quiet of the night, the sounds of swords clashing were suddenly heard. After two noises, it became silent again. It was silent for a long time before another two clashes were heard. Di Yun guessed that the Blood Sabre Elder was discovered by his opponent and the two were now fighting. Judging by the sound of the sword clashes, his opponent's martial arts were at least as good as his.

Another four clashes were heard, now even Shui Sheng was awoken by the noise. The view outside the valley was covered in snow as far as the eye could see, shining a tint of silver under the moonlight reflecting the white clouds; it was approaching daybreak. Shui Sheng glanced over at Di Yun and moved her lips as if she had something to say, but she loathed him greatly and thought that he may not answer, so she did not speak out.

The sounds of sword clashes grew louder and more intense. Di Yun and Shui Sheng both raised their heads to follow the direction of the sound. Under the moonlight, two shadows could be seen spiralling around; a sabre and sword collided with intensity in the upper northeast section. The cliff was arduous and steep with a large accumulation of snow, it was difficult to get up there. However, the two fought intensely without stopping in the least, the luminous lustre of the sword and sabre was reflected by the valley as they battled each other on top of the cliff.

Di Yun looked closely at the cliff and saw that the man fighting with the Blood Sabre Elder wore a Taoist garment and wielded a long sword; it was one of the members of Luohua Liushui. Di Yun did not know how this person managed to venture into the valley after the avalanche covered the mountain.

At the same time, Shui Sheng saw the Taoist as well and was overcome with joy. She blurted: "It is Uncle Liu. Uncle Liu Chengfeng is here! Daddy! Daddy! I'm over here!"

Di Yun was taken aback and thought: "The Blood Sabre Elder and this old Taoist are closely matched, it will be hard to say who will come out on top. If her father hears her voice and comes for her, wouldn't he kill me immediately?" Then he hurriedly said: "Hey, don't yell! If the avalanche comes down on us again, we will all die!"

Shui Sheng retorted: "I am trying to get you killed along with me." Then she yelled again: "Daddy! Daddy! I'm over here!"

Di Yun reprimanded: "If the avalanche comes down, your father will die too. You want him to die?"

Shui Sheng realized that what he said was true and did not yell out again, but she thought: "How can my father's abilities be compared? Anyone who escaped the avalanche would have run home, yet Uncle Liu Chengfeng rushed into the valley. If Uncle Liu is here, then naturally my daddy is here as well. Even if an avalanche comes down, the worst that can happen is that I die, but my father will be unharmed. This old vicious monk is so formidable, if he kills Uncle Liu, I will have to suffer." Then she yelled again: "Daddy! Daddy! I'm over here!"

Di Yun did not know how to stop her from yelling. He looked up at the Blood Sabre Elder again and saw that he was in a critical moment of battle against the Taoist Liu Chengfeng. The Blood Sabre Elder danced around like a gloomy red magnificence, prancing and spiralling about in the vastness of white snow. Liu Chengfeng did not execute his sword stances with remarkable speed, instead he fought rather cautiously. As these two formidable opponents clashed, Di Yun could not figure out who would be victorious. However, as he heard the constant yell of Shui Sheng for her "daddy" and then switching to yelling for her "Biaoge", he became distraught with anxiety. He warned: "Little girl, if you don't shut up, I'm going to cut off your tongue."

Shui Sheng replied: "I insist on yelling! I insist on yelling!" Then she yelled: "Daddy! Daddy! I'm over here!" But she was afraid that Di Yun would really take action, so she grabbed a large piece of rock in self-defense. After a while, she saw him sit on the ground without saying a word, and suddenly recalled: "This vicious monk had his leg broken by my Biaoge. If the old monk had not rescued him, he would have been killed a long time ago. He can't even move, what do I have to be afraid of him for?" Then she thought further: "I am really stupid! The old monk is preoccupied in battle, why can't I just kill the little monk?" Then she raised the large piece of rock over her head and approached Di Yun, intending to smash his head.

Di Yun had no way of resisting and could only roll away, the rock scraped past his face, narrowly missing its target. Shui Sheng saw that she failed in her first attempt and bent over to pick up another piece of rock. This time, she hit her target on the stomach. Di Yun tried to roll away but his broken leg was ineffective; he screeched as he was hit on the calf.

Shui Sheng was delighted and immediately picked up another piece of rock to throw. Di Yun knew that he was powerless to resist her attack and was hit seven or eight times consecutively, how could he keep himself alive? Immediately, he picked up a piece of rock and shouted: "If you hit me again, I'm going to crush you to death first." But only saw her launch another rock at him and immediately rolled to evade the blow. Then with all his might he threw the rock in hand toward her.

Shui Sheng dodged to the left. The rock flew past her ear and scraped some skin and flesh off her face. She was taken aback and did not dare to hurl another rock at him. She turned around and picked up a twig, then executed a stance of "Push the Boat Along the Current" and aimed to stab at Di Yun's shoulder. Her sword skills were taught by her family and were somewhat brilliant. Even though she only held a twig in hand, if she were to attack, even if Di Yun was fully recovered, in terms of swordplay, he would not be her match. As he saw the approaching twig he slanted his shoulder to evade the attack, but Shui Sheng had already changed stances and at once his forehead was stabbed.

If it was a real sword, Di Yun would have lost his life right then and there. However, that was after all just a twig, but Di Yun was still in so much pain that his vision was filled with gold stars. Shui Sheng scolded: "You vicious monk has been torturing me this entire time and even wanted to cut off my tongue! Why don't you cut it off and show me!" She lifted her twig and began smacking him hard on the shoulder and forehead and yelled: "Tell your grand-teacher to come save you! I will kill you, you vicious monk!" As she said this, her attacks became faster and more intense.

Di Yun was powerless to resist and could only shield face with his shoulder. In an instant, he was beaten so badly that it was as if his flesh was lacerated from corporal punishment, blood splattered everywhere. He was both startled and in pain. Then he exerted all his strength to grab the twig and threw it to the side. Shui Sheng was taken aback by this move, but she moved back a few steps and reached behind to grab another twig to attack again.

In the case of such an emergency, Di Yun suddenly recalled the scoundrel technique that country folks would use after losing a fight. He shouted: "Stand there! Move another step and I'll take off my pants!" With both hands he held onto his pants and made a gesture as if he was about to pull them off.

Shui Sheng was alarmed and immediately turned her head around, both her cheeks flushed red. She thought: "This evil monk is really not above any crime, he is resorting to such a despicable method to humiliate me."

Di Yun said: "Move away five steps, the farther the better."

Shui Sheng's heart was thumping intensely and sure enough, she really did move away five steps. Di Yun was delighted and shouted: "I have taken off my pants. If you still want to hit me, then go ahead!"

Shui Sheng was so shocked that she ran away several dozen feet, her heart beating rapidly. She accidentally stumbled over the slippery ground but hastily got up again and ran. She did not dare to turn around to look and ran all the way to the rear of the hillside.

Di Yun did not actually take off his pants. He thought it was funny but also sighed at his own misfortune. To be still alive yet still suffering beatings, he was hit 30 or 40 times and his calf was also smashed by the rock, causing him excruciating pain. He thought: "Had I not resorted to this tactic, I would have most likely been killed already. I Di Yun could be considered a gentleman, yet today I have to resort to such despicable means. Ai, I am really unfortunate!"

He turned his attention to the battle on the overhanging cliff between the Blood Sabre Elder and Liu Chengfeng. As a piece of rock fell from the top of the cliff, judging by the wind, he could tell that it was at least 700 or 800 feet high. From afar he could only see the slippery ice on the ground and the snowfall. It was evident that should any one of the two slip and fall, no matter how high their martial arts were, their bodies would be torn and their bones would be crushed. Di Yun could make out the movements of the two fighters; the sleeves of their garments fluttered in the air like that of two supernatural entities soaring amongst the clouds. In the sky were two eagles soaring through the wind. In comparison, the movements of the two fighters were very much faster.

From the back of the hillside, Shui Sheng yelled: "Daddy! Daddy! Come quickly!"

She yelled several times, when suddenly from the southeast an old voice responded: “Is it Niece Shui? Your father suffered some minor injuries, he will be here soon!”

Shui Sheng heard that this was the voice of the second member of Luohua Liushui, Hua Tiegan. She was delighted and shouted: “Uncle Hua! Where is my daddy? How badly is he hurt?”

In an instant, Hua Tiegan made his way towards Shui Sheng and said: “During the avalanche, a large piece of rock fell on your Uncle Lu. Your father deflected the rock away with his palm, but the rock was really heavy and hurt your father’s upper arm, but it is only a minor injury.”

Shui Sheng said: “There’s a vicious monk hiding over there... he took off his... Uncle Hua, kill him quickly.”

Hua Tiegan said: “Alright, where is he?”

Shui Sheng pointed at the direction of Di Yun, but she was afraid that she would catch a glimpse of his naked body and accidentally pointed forward a few extra steps.

As Hua Tiegan was about to kill Di Yun, suddenly the clang of metal sounds were heard from the overhanging cliff. He looked up and saw the Blood Sabre Elder and Liu Chengfeng engaged in battle, neither of them made a move as if they were suddenly frozen. He knew that at this point of the battle they had to resort to an internal energy struggle and thought: “This Blood Sabre Elder is very fierce, Brother Liu may not necessarily be able to gain the upper hand. If I do not rush in for support, then when will I? Even though I have made a prestigious name for myself in the martial world, I am still unwilling to share this title with others. When the heroes of the Central Plains chased after the two blood sabre monks on such a large scale, this news had spread everywhere. If I kill the Blood Sabre Elder personally, I will most definitely see a substantial increase in my reputation, it would be enough to offset the dishonourable act of having to win “two-against-one.” He held on to this thought and at once he turned around and made his way up the cliff.

Shui Sheng was confused and asked: “Uncle Hua, what are you doing?” But she already knew the answer. She saw Hua Tiegan climb up the cliff silently, his right hand holding a pure steel spear, the tip of the spear attached against the wall of the cliff for support which allowed him to jump a surplus of ten feet every leap. When he dropped, he would use the spear for support, he made his way up the cliff a lot faster than when the Blood Sabre Elder and Liu Chengfeng fought their way up there.

When Di Yun heard that this person’s footsteps was becoming more and more distant, he became more relaxed, but he saw that the man was leaping his way up the cliff and could not help but yell out in surprise. At this point, the only hope would be that the Blood Sabre Elder could kill Liu Chengfeng before Hua Tiegan reached the top of the cliff, then he could focus his attention on Hua Tiegan. Otherwise, if he were to face them one-against-two, he would most certainly be defeated. Di Yun thought: “Liu Chengfeng and Hua Tiegan can both be considered honourable heroes. The Blood Sabre Elder is clearly a thoroughly cruel and evil person, yet I am hoping that this evil person will kill these good people. Ai, this... this is really immoral.” He blamed himself yet he was full of worry. His heart was jumping around in a state of confusion.

Then Hua Tiegan reached the top of the cliff.



The Blood Sabre Elder channelled his energy to compete with Liu Chengfeng, both increasing their internal energy layer by layer, like the great waves of an ocean, pushing forward one after another. Liu Chengfeng was a renowned practitioner of Taiji, in his life he had studied meticulously into the idea of using softness to conquer strength. While the Blood Sabre Elder's internal energy rushed forth like that of a flood, he channelled his internal energy into a circle in an attempt to dissolve the offensive energy of his opponent; he first wanted to secure an invincible position before focusing on attack. The Blood Sabre Elder's force was remarkable, when his internal energy pushed forward it dissipated into various directions of his opponent, fluctuating irregularly. However, after being deadlocked for such a long time, he was eventually going to be defeated. By now, they had focused their attention completely on the fight and had long turned a blind eye to external distractions. They could not hear nor smell. When Hua Tiegan leapt his way to the top of the cliff, it was not completely without sound, only that they could not hear it.

Hua Tiegan saw that steam was rising from the top of their heads and knew that their internal energies had already been stressed to the max. He stealthily made his way behind the Blood Sabre Elder and raised his steel spear, gathering energy on both his arms ready to strike. The tip of the spear flickered under the light and its momentum was supported by strong winds as he stabbed him on the back.

The tip of the spear was reflected by the icy walls of the cliff and emitted a flash of light. The Blood Sabre Elder took notice of this as he felt a very strong wind coming from behind. At this time, his blood sabre was in the middle of a clash with Liu Chengfeng's long sword, it was difficult for him to even move forward an inch, much less change stances and protect his back. His thoughts changed rapidly as he pondered: "I will die either way. Better to fall to my own death than let my opponents kill me." He bent both knees then slanted to the side and pounced outward intending to jump off the cliff.

Hua Tiegan had intended to kill the Blood Sabre Elder with a single spear strike and executed a stance of "Conquering the Four Barbarians", using his utmost power into this attack. How would he have guessed that the Blood Sabre Elder, in such a critical moment, would decide to jump off a cliff? A loud piercing sound was heard; the tip of the spear had pierced completely through Liu Chengfeng's chest and came out on the other side. Hua Tiegan did not have time to relinquish his attack, nor did Liu Chengfeng ever expect something like this would happen.

As the Blood Sabre Elder fell off the cliff in midair, he propelled himself forward and with a loud scream, raised his sabre and slashed downward, precisely stabbing on top of a large piece of rock. With a loud bang, the blood sabre stabbed into the piece of rock but did not break. The Blood Sabre Elder borrowed the momentum to lift himself upward, with both hands he brandished his surroundings, cracking the nearby ice and snow, then followed that he rolled more than a dozen times on the ground. He tried to stop himself with repeated slashes and palm strikes. After 18 flips, he managed to stop the downward force and landed firmly on the snow as he burst into laughter.

All of a sudden, from behind someone shouted: "Watch my sabre!" The Blood Sabre Elder recognized the sound of a sabre. He did not turn around but flipped his sabre over to defend from behind, with a loud clang, the two sabres clashed dead on. He felt his chest was in pain and the sabre nearly flew out of his hands which was definitely no small matter. He thought: "This person's internal energy can actually be so powerful!" He turned around and saw a tall and sturdy old man who appeared a light white shade and gave off a bold and powerful appearance. This man wielded a

thick square-headed ghost-head sabre. The Blood Sabre Elder jumped backwards and retreated, amidst his haste, he did not realize that he had already used up over half his internal energy as a result of fighting Liu Chengfeng for over half a day. Furthermore, he managed to survive the fall of the cliff thanks to exerting his arm strength to stab against the rock. He tried to channel his energy but felt that his pubic region had a distinct pain. He could no longer channel any more internal energy.

From the left side a person shouted: “Brother Lu, this perverted monk killed... killed Brother Liu. We must... must...” The one who spoke was Hua Tiegan. He accidentally killed Liu Chengfeng and was filled with grief and indignation. He climbed down the cliff in great haste and was determined to engage in a fight to the death with the blood sabre monk. As it turns out, the leader of the Four Marvels of the South, Lu Tianshu arrived at this precise moment, and it was going to be a battle of two-against-one.

The Blood Sabre Elder saw as Hua Tiegan approached to his direction. He could not even handle Lu Tianshu in his current state, what more of an additional expert? The only way was if he were to hold Shui Sheng hostage so that they would not dare to attack, then come up with another plan.

He kept this thought in his mind. Lu Tianshu brandished his ghost-head sabre and slashed forward. The Blood Sabre Elder ducked and swiped the lower half of his opponent’s body twice. Lu Tianshu was naturally tall and sturdy, the lower half of his body was also firm and steady, although his legs were quite long and at once he moved his sabre to defend his lower half. The two swipes of the Blood Sabre Elder were actually false attacks. However, in false attacks were also a sense of truth; had Lu Tianshu been even slightly careless during his defense, this false attack could have become a real attack and would have been capable of taking his life at once. When the Blood Sabre Elder saw that Lu Tianshu defended so remarkably without any sign of weakness he immediately rushed forward a big step, then all of a sudden leapt backwards. Such a technique of misdirection enabled him to break away from the range of the ghost-head sabre.

He sprinted his way toward Di Yun and Shui Sheng was nowhere to be found. He immediately asked: “Where is that little doll?”

Di Yun replied, “She’s over there,” as he pointed toward her direction.

The Blood Sabre Elder was enraged. “You let her get away, why didn’t you catch her?”

Di Yun said: “I... I could not catch her.”

The Blood Sabre Elder was extremely furious. He was already a very rude and unreasonable person by nature; now in a situation of life and death, he vented his anger to its utmost extreme and with his right leg kicked Di Yun hard on the waist. Di Yun groaned bitterly and was immediately sent flying outward. They were currently in a deep valley of a peak, yet this valley composed of yet smaller valleys. When Di Yun was sent flying outward, he fell straight down below the valley.

Shui Sheng heard the noise and turned to look and saw that Di Yun was falling to the bottom of the valley. She was startled as she saw the Blood Sabre Elder pounce himself towards her. At this precise moment, someone shouted: “Sheng’er! Sheng’er!” Her father had arrived.

Shui Sheng was delighted and shouted: "Daddy! Daddy!" At this moment she was still somewhat far from her father and the Blood Sabre Elder rushed forward in great haste, he was about 30 feet or so away from her. Had she not just yelled out in delight, upon seeing her father, she definitely would have turned around and ran towards him which would have furthered the distance between her and the Blood Sabre Elder. However, she still lacked experience and amidst her joyous shouts of "Daddy!" she forgot that she was being pursued by the Blood Sabre Elder.

Shui Dai yelled: "Sheng'er, come over here quick!" Shui Sheng immediately woke up and began running forward. Shui Dai ran forward as well.

The Blood Sabre Elder said to himself: "No good!" He immediately rushed to the entrance, bent over and made a snowball in each hand. He channelled his energy and with his right hand threw the first snowball toward Shui Dai while he threw the second snowball toward Shui Sheng at the same time.

Shui Dai raised his sword to block the snowball which impeded his movements slightly. The second snowball hit Shui Sheng right on the "Lingtai" acupoint and sealed it. The sound of wind blowing could be heard as a sharp spear made its way toward the scene. Hua Tiegan had arrived.

Hua Tiegan had reached the utmost extreme of grief and repentance for accidentally killing his sworn brother Liu Chengfeng. At this point, he no longer cared for Shui Sheng's safety, and attacked with his spear in both arms with utmost intensity. The Blood Sabre Elder raised his sabre and slashed, then a loud sound was heard as the blood sabre was repelled. It turns out that Hua Tiegan's pole and tip of the spear were both made of the finest of steel and could not be broken even by precious sabres or swords.

The Blood Sabre Elder cursed, "Damn it!" and grabbed Shui Sheng and retreated one step, but saw that the ghost-head sabre of Lu Tianshu was about to strike. He was surrounded by his enemies and could go forward. His eyes glared across the scene in search of an exit. He caught a small glimpse of Di Yun sitting at the bottom of the valley and thought: "The snow down there is so deep and that little kid did not even fall to his death!" Immediately, he extended his arm to grab Shui Sheng and jumped down.

Shui Sheng let out a sharp cry as the two of them fell to the bottom of the valley. The accumulation of snow in the valley was more than a hundred feet thick, and the snow down there had frozen to ice, but the outermost layer was soft and served as a cushion. The two of them did not sustain the slightest bit of injury from this fall. The Blood Sabre Elder came out of the pile of snow and looked around. He stood on a large piece of rock, raised his sabre and laughed: "If you have the guts, come down here and we will fight to the death!"

The piece of rock that the Blood Sabre Elder was standing on was stationed right at the entrance. If Shui Dai and the others were to come down, they would definitely have to make their way past this rock, and they would most certainly be cut in half should they try to do so. While they were suspended in midair, even if their martial arts were ten times more superior, they still could not glide with the freedom of a bird.

Lu Tianshu, Hua Tiegan, and Shui Dai had gone to such lengths to chase after the blood sabre monk, to let him get away would be utmost unforgivable. Furthermore, Shui Dai's daughter was being held hostage by the perverted monk, and Hua Tiegan was further enraged from mistakenly killing his sworn brother. The three of them got together for a discussion.

Lu Tianshu's nickname was "Righteous Sabre Lu"; Hua Tiegan's nickname was "Zhongping Undeclared", dominating the martial world with his Zhongping Spear; Shui Dai's nickname was "Cold Moon Sword"; and together with Liu Chengfeng whose nickname was "Soft Cloud Sword", together they were known as "Luohua Liushui". What is so called "Luohua Liushui" is actually "Lu Hua Liu Shui", each character representing their ranking and respective surnames. Although in terms of martial arts, Lu Tianshu may not necessarily be considered number one in the group, he was the eldest and most popular. Hence, he was also the leader of the "Four Marvels of the South". His temperament was like that of a raging inferno and hated anyone who was unjust or offended public morals greatly, which was further accentuated when he saw the Blood Sabre Elder standing on top of the rock trying to show off his power while Shui Sheng's body was reclined next to Di Yun. He did not know that Shui Sheng's acupoint was sealed and could not move and thought that her personality was chaste or upright, that when she fell into the hands of the blood sabre monks she did not even resist. Under extreme anger, he picked up several pieces of small rock and threw it at them.

His heavy arm strength was further supported by the long distance to the bottom of the valley; when he threw the rock, it gained more speed and energy as the downward force increased. A loud crashing sound echoed through the four walls of the valley, snowflakes splashing around at the bottom.

The Blood Sabre Elder bent down and pulled Di Yun and Shui Sheng behind the large rock. At this moment he was temporarily out of danger so he no longer felt angry at Di Yun. He straightened himself and stood firm on top of the large rock. He pointed at his three enemies above and began to curse profusely. Whenever they threw a rock at him he would simply dodge it, how could they damage him? From the distant he saw Liu Chengfeng motionless on top of the overhanging cliff and recalled their battle. He inferred that it must have been Hua Tiegan who accidentally killed his comrade with his failed sneak attack.

Di Yun saw that the walls behind the large rock had a depression which looked like a cave. The large rock blocked the entrance and inside the cave there was not much snow and could be considered a safe haven. He further saw that rocks kept falling towards them from above and feared that one of them would hit Shui Sheng. At once he hugged her sideways and placed her inside the cave. Shui Sheng was alarmed and shouted: "Don't touch me! Don't touch me!"

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed and shouted: "My good grand-disciple! Your grand-teacher will stay outside and hold back our enemies. Go in the cave and satisfy your lustful desires!"

Shui Dai and the others above heard his words very clearly and became so mad that their chest almost exploded of anger.

Shui Sheng thought that Di Yun really intended to rape her so she was extremely frightened. She saw that his clothes were hardly intact and barely fit him. She recalled how he claimed to have taken off his pants and realized that it was a lie in order to scare her away. As she thought of this her face flushed red and she yelled: "Deceiving vicious monk, stay away from me!"

Now that Di Yun placed her inside the cave, she would no longer risk being injured by any rocks, so he moved out of the way. However, his thigh was still broken and his calf was still damaged, how could he walk? He could only crawl his way out.

The three men on top and the Blood Sabre Elder had been deadlocked for some time and it was the middle of the night, the sky gradually brightened. The Blood Sabre Elder made use of this time to gradually recover some of his energy. He wondered: "How can I get out of this place?" In front of him were three people whose martial arts could be considered to be on par with his, as soon as he moves away the large rock he would no longer have the advantage of position and would have no way of defending himself against their combined attack. He could not think of a way to escape and remained on top of the rock, punching and prancing around in awkward positions so as to make fun of his enemies and amuse himself.

Lu Tianshu became increasingly enraged as he watched and cursed profusely. Hua Tiegan suddenly came up with an idea and whispered: "Brother Shui, head to the east and pretend to slide down the valley. I will head west and pretend to attack to lure the monk out of the way. Brother Lu can take advantage of this and jump down."

Lu Tianshu remarked: "This is a wonderful idea."

Shui Dai said: "If he does not come forward to defend, then we will really fall down the valley!" At once, the he and Hua Tiegan ran off in their respective directions.

In the vicinity of over a thousand feet they were surrounded by cliffs. If one were to actually slide down the valley, one would first have to travel a full circle and a long distance. The Blood Sabre Elder saw the two of them headed in opposite directions, clearly trying to take a roundabout route into the valley. However, he could not immediately come up with a way to stop them, and thought: "Damn it! This is not good. The two of them are trying to enter through a roundabout. But the circumference is very long and it will take them upwards of two hours before they get here. If I do not run away now, when can I find a better opportunity? If they can turn a circle to attack me, then I can turn a circle to escape." Immediately, without even notifying Di Yun, he quietly slipped down the rock.

Lu Tianshu watched as his two brothers went their separate directions. When he lowered his head to look, the Blood Sabre Elder was nowhere to be found, but he could see a path of footprints heading toward the northwest direction. He yelled: "Brother Hua, Brother Shui, the evil monk is trying to escape! Come back!" The two of them heard this and immediately turned around.

In great haste to pursue his opponent, Lu Tianshu rushed forth and jumped down the valley and was immediately drowned by the large accumulation of snow. However, when he jumped he had already held his breathe, but he felt as if he was constantly sinking down until his foot touched the ground, then immediately he exerted his strength and jumped back up. As the top of his head made its way out of the pile of snow, he suddenly felt a pain in his chest, he was ambushed by his opponent. Taken aback and completely startled, he immediately unleashed his sabre and began slashing around mindlessly. He felt as if he had wounded his enemy. However, his enemy only suffered minor injuries and beneath the snow slashed forward with his sabre.

It turns out that the Blood Sabre Elder heard Lu Tianshu's yell and knew that he would drop down the valley to pursue him, therefore he turned around and hid himself in the pile of snow behind the large rock. Not only were Lu Tianshu's martial arts high, he also had much experience. To be able to set up a sneak attack on him like this was extremely unlikely. However, at that moment he fell down into a pile of snow over a hundred feet deep, it was a scenario which he had never experienced

before. Naturally, he concentrated his attention completely on breathing and exerting energy so as to not hurt himself. He definitely saw the Blood Sabre Elder run off, how would he have guessed that his enemy would conceal himself in the pile of snow? It was truly a case of an unexpected occurrence amongst unexpected occurrences.

But nonetheless, he was still a figure in the martial world of the Central Plains and could be considered cream of the crop. Although he was wounded in the chest, he was still able to counterattack and slashed out three times in succession inside the pile of snow. He knew that the Blood Sabre Elder was incredibly sneaky; in a match against him, he could not afford to relax his efforts in the slightest. So even though these three slashes were executed mindlessly in self-defense, it still harboured great strength.

After the Blood Sabre Elder was wounded, he increased his efforts further. He backed up one step but did not realize that where he was standing, the snow had yet to be frozen to ice so it felt a bit hollow and he began to sink down.

Lu Tianshu had executed three slashes consecutively without the slightest hint of allowing his opponent any leisure. Then he followed with another three slashes. He knew that under the force of six slashes his opponent would have no choice but to retreat, and immediately pressed forward to attack. However, he felt his feet began to sink into the pile of snow.

The two of them were currently in the most strange and unlikely situation, with nothing but snow covering their entire vision. Furthermore, they could not even hear the wind or distinguish the sound of weapons. Effectively both blind and deaf, they could not even utilize their martial arts that they normally could in the darkness of the night. As soon as their feet touched the bottom of the ground, the two of them began to execute the greatest sword stances that they had ever learned. The pile of snow covered them over one hundred feet deep; besides one killing the other, neither of them dared to venture back to surface. Whoever held back even slightly would immediately be slashed and lose their life immediately.

Di Yun heard loud shouts from outside the cave followed by silence and was curious and took a peak outside. The Blood Sabre Elder was nowhere to be found, and the pile of snow beside the large rock had faint signs of fluctuation. He was curious and after watching for a while, realized that inside pile of snow was an intense battle. He looked up and saw Shui Dai and Hua Tiegan standing on the side, looking at the bottom of the valley with an anxious expression. Since the two of them were up there, the one fighting inside the snow must be Lu Tianshu. Shui Sheng extended her head outside and saw her father's expression of undivided attention. They were separated by a great distance and she did not dare to yell.

The two on top of the valley both wanted to join in the battle but were hesitant. Shui Dai said: "Second Brother Hua, I will jump down now."

Hua Tiegan said: "You can't do that! If you sink inside the pile of snow, how can you fight? You can't see anything down there, you might... might accidentally hurt Brother Lu." He did not dare to say that he was the one who accidentally killed his close brother Liu Chengfeng and felt really sorry. However, Shui Dai did not know this.

In such a situation, there was no way for Shui Dai to offer his assistance. If he went inside the snow, besides slashing around mindlessly, how could he differentiate friend from foe? He had two

opportunities to kill either the Blood Sabre Elder or Lu Tianshu. However, he would also have two opportunities of being killed by either of them as well. Hence, even though there were two experts watching from the sidelines, they could only watch with folded arms as their Brother Lu fought the Blood Sabre Elder single-handedly. It was truly a case of being unable to find a solution. No matter how they jumped down, they would sink into the accumulation of snow and join the battle. And furthermore, based on the movements of snow on the surface, if they just jump down, they might accidentally land on top of Lu Tianshu.

Eventually, the snow on the surface stopped moving. From Hua Tiegan and Shui Dai who were on top of the valley, to Di Yun and Shui Sheng who were watching inside the cave, all of them were overcome with anxiety, not knowing the outcome of the battle. The four of them held their breaths in anticipation, their gaze fixed completely on the pile of snow.

After a long while, the snow on the surface began to bulge as someone's head emerged from the snow. However, this person's head was covered completely in snow and they could not distinguish who it actually was. As this person gradually made his way back to the surface, one could make out that it was a head full of white hair. It was Lu Tianshu!

Shui Sheng was delighted and cheered in private. Di Yun scoffed: "What is there to be happy about?"

Shui Sheng replied: "Your grand-teacher is dead now, it looks like you will be joining him soon." Even if she did not say this aloud, would Di Yun not know this? In his recent past, he had joined up with the Blood Sabre Elder; a case of "the one near vermillion becomes red". Some of the Blood Sabre Elder's violent and unreasonable temper had unwittingly rubbed off on him. Now that Lu Tianshu had emerged the victor, he would most definitely fall victim to his enemies, how would he have any chance of explaining himself? He was surprisingly angry and shouted: "If you speak again I will kill you immediately."

Shui Sheng sealed her lips and did not say another word. Her acupoint was sealed by the Blood Sabre Elder; even though Di Yun was crippled, he would still be able to kill her without much difficulty.

As Lu Tianshu's head reached the surface, he gasped loudly for breath. He had to struggle with great effort to pull himself out of the snow. Shui Dai and Hua Tiegan shouted in unison: "Brother Lu, we're coming for you!" The two of them threw themselves down into the pile of snow and immediately scuttled their way out beside the large rock.

Suddenly, they saw Lu Tianshu's head submerge into the pile of snow again as if he was pulled down with a great force. After he sunk down again, he did not come back up, but the Blood Sabre Elder was nowhere to be seen.

Shui Dai and Hua Tiegan looked at each other and were filled with worry and anxiety. They saw how Lu Tianshu was pulled into the pile of snow at such a speed without anyway to retaliate, a good chance that he had been ambushed by his opponent.

All of a sudden, a large ripple erupted as another head emerged from the snow. This time, the head belonged to the completely bald blood sabre monk. He laughed heartily and submerged into the snow again. Shui Dai cursed, "Bald thief!" and raised his sword intending to join the fray, when suddenly another head blasted out of the snow.

This head was separated from the body; covered with white hair, it was none other than the severed head of Lu Tianshu. The head flew outward several dozen feet before it landed on the pile of snow and submerged again. Shui Sheng was so startled by this horrific scene that she nearly passed out without even being able to cry out.

Shui Dai was overwhelmed with grief and indignation. He cried: “Brother Lu, you gave your life away for your brothers. Your brother I will avenge you.”

Immediately he was about to jump out when he was pulled on the left arm by Hua Tiegan who said: “Hold on! This evil monk is hiding inside the snow. He has the advantage of being hidden while we are plain as day, if we jump in without caution, he will ambush us for sure.”

Shui Dai knew that Hua Tiegan spoke true words and sighed: “Then... then what do we do?”

Hua Tiegan said: “How long can he stay submerged in snow? He will have to come back up eventually, and when he does, we will attack him together. We will cut off throat and gouge out his heart as a sacrifice to our two fallen brothers.”

Shui Dai tried to hold back his tears as it slowly dropped down his cheeks. He thought: “I must cool down and regain my composure. I mustn’t cry! Facing a powerful enemy in such circumstances, I can’t let my emotions cloud my judgement.” However, he had lost two friends whom he had known for over a dozen years on the same day, how can he not be sad? How can he keep his emotions under control?

The two of them knew that the Blood Sabre Elder would eventually resurface. They moved alongside each other and leapt past one rock then another, gradually making their way to Di Yun and Shui Sheng. Shui Sheng looked askance at Di Yun and schemed inside her head. As soon as her father was another several dozen feet closer, she would scream out so he can rescue her. If she screams too early, she was afraid that Di Yun would kill her first. Di Yun could tell from her expression that her gaze was unfixed and knew her intentions. He pretended to close his eyes to recuperate. Shui Sheng began to ignore him and fixed her gaze on her father. Suddenly, Di Yun jumped up and pounced himself behind Shui Sheng. He raised his left arm and choked her throat.

Shui Sheng was taken aback. She was just about to yell, but how can she let out any noise? She only felt Di Yun’s arm choking her and made her breathing difficult. Then she heard him whisper to her ear: “If you promise not to yell, I won’t choke you to death!” As he said this, he lessened his grip on her slightly and let her breathe. However, his rough and strong arm was clutched against her delicate skin. Shui Sheng reviled him deeply in her heart, but there was nothing she could do.

Shui Dai and Hua Tiegan crouched down behind a nearby rock but saw that there was absolutely no activity in the valley and felt somewhat perplexed. They did not know what trick the Blood Sabre Elder was scheming, how could he remain under the snow for so long?

Overwhelmed with grief and sorrow, they did not remember that the Blood Sabre Elder grew up in a world of ice and snow and was quite well acquainted with his surroundings. Previously, when he hid beneath the snow, he immediately carved a large hole with his blood sabre and packed the snow firmly with his palm and created breathing room for himself. Lu Tianshu did not know of such an ingenious method. When he resurfaced to gasp for air he slashed around mindlessly. Although he



had an abundance of internal energy, it was not enough to overcome the Blood Sabre Elder's advantage of not having to hold his breath. So when the two of them fought beneath the surface, one of them had to occasionally resurface to take a breath while the other remained underneath indefinitely. Eventually, Lu Tianshu could not hold his breath any longer and took a great risk to resurface. Immediately, he was hit consecutively three times and lost his life.

Shui Dai and Hua Tiegan became more and more anxious as they waited. The time it took to burn one incense stick had already passed, yet there was no sight of the blood sabre monk. Shui Dai said: "It is likely that the vicious monk suffered internal injuries and perished beneath the snow."

Hua Tiegan said: "I think this is likely as well. How would Brother Lu be killed by him without returning two slashes of his own? Furthermore, the evil monk had previously fought a tedious battle against Brother Liu, he should not be Brother Lu's match."

Shui Dai said: "He must have used some sort of trick to defeat Brother Lu." As he said this, he could not hold back his sorrow and declared: "I will go down and take a look."

Hua Tiegan said: "Alright then, but you must be careful. I will stay here and keep watch."

Shui Dai held his long sword firmly in hand, inhaled a large breath of air and executed his lightness martial arts. He slid across the surface of the snow for several dozen feet before his feet began to sink beneath the surface and he moved even faster. The accumulation of snow all around this mountain peak was extremely deep and would not see the light of day for thousands of years. Although the bottom of the valley amassed a lot of snow, it had long been mixed with ice. It was like that of wet mud and one would immediately sink should they jump on it. He used his lightness martial arts to slide across the surface in order to not sink in. Shui Dai's lightness martial arts were indeed impressive and he began sliding faster and faster across the surface. He heard Hua Tiegan compliment: "Excellent lightness martial arts! Brother Shui, the evil monk is nearby, be careful!"

He did not even finish speaking when someone emerged several dozen feet in front of Shui Dai. It was indeed the blood sabre monk. However, the blood sabre monk was empty-handed without his sabre and shouted "Ayo!" and did not dare to confront Shui Dai head on. He floated westward several dozen feet and said urgently: "A gentleman seeks fairness in a competition. You have a weapon in hand but I am empty-handed, how can we fight?"

Shui Dai did not yet reply when Hua Tiegan blurted: "Just kill the evil monk! Who needs to speak of fairness or unfairness at this point?" His lightness martial arts was not as good as Shui Dai's and did not dare to jump into the snow. He manoeuvred himself around the large rock and attacked from the side.

Shui Dai thought that the evil monk must have lost his blood sabre in the snow during the battle with Brother Lu. This pile of snow was hundreds of feet deep, how could retrieve it? When he saw that his opponent was without a weapon, he took extra caution for he knew that victory was in sight. However, he could not let him run too far away and hide in the snow again, disappearing without a trace. He shouted: "Shameless evil monk! Where is my daughter? If you tell me, I will kill you in one slash and give you a quick and painless death! Otherwise, you will suffer endlessly."

The Blood Sabre Elder replied: “The place that this little doll is hidden, even if you search for upwards of half a month, you still won’t be able to find her. But if you let me go, I will tell you.” As he said this, he continued running without stopping.

Shui Dai thought “I will deceive him into telling me first.” and said: “We are surrounded by peaks in all four directions. Even if I let you go, where can you run off to?”

The Blood Sabre Elder said: “This location is extremely odd. However, I have lived here for several years in the past and know this place like the back of my hand. If you kill me, you won’t be able to find your way out and will have no choice but starve to death. Why don’t we let go of our past differences and work together? I will return your daughter to you and lead you out of this place, what do you think?”

Hua Tiegan scoffed: “How can the words of a vicious monk be trusted? Kneel down and beg for mercy, we will decide how to deal with you. Do you think you still have any leverage?” As he said this, he continued his pursuit.

The Blood Sabre Elder replied: “Very well then, your father I must be excused!” He increased his speed and ran in the northeast direction.

Shui Dai shouted: “Where do you think you’re going!” He raised his sword and pursued in great haste.

The Blood Sabre Elder ran away in great haste. After running for several hundred feet, he was about to reach the edge of the peak with nowhere left to go. At once he turned around and went the other way, slanting his body running past Shui Dai. Shui Dai brandished his sword to attack but missed his target by about a foot. The Blood Sabre Elder continued running the northwest direction. Shui Dai saw as he was retracing his path and thought: “He is just running back and forth around the valley, where can he go? However, to chase him around vigorously like this, both of our lightness martial arts are impressive, it will be no easy task. And I still don’t know where Sheng’er is.”

He became anxious and increased his pace, closing the gap between his opponent by about a foot, when all of a sudden he heard the Blood Sabre Elder shout “Ayo!” and fell forward, both hands clawing wildly as he attempted to get back up. It must be that his internal energy was completely exhausted, he could not even get back up after his fall.

Di Yun and Shui Sheng watched everything closely from the cave. One was in a state of panic while the other was delighted. Di Yun looked askance at Shui Sheng and saw her face full of joy and he became resentful. He could not help but increase his strength and tighten his arm around her.

Shui Dai watched as the Blood Sabre Elder could not even get up, how could he let go of such a golden opportunity? Immediately he pressed forward and raised his sword to stab him on the butt. The intent of this was not to kill him, but rather injure him so that he cannot run away, and then torture him until he reveals his daughter’s location. His long sword only moved about a foot when suddenly the ground beneath him collapsed and brought him down. He was standing on a deep hole.

This was definitely a strange occurrence, how was the Blood Sabre Elder still able to execute such devious methods of sorcery? Hua Tiegan, Di Yun, and Shui Sheng watched as Shui Dai nearly reached his target but disappeared all of a sudden without a trace. Then followed that a long and

miserable shriek was heard from beneath the surface; it was the voice of Shui Dai. He must have fell victim to some kind of extremely terrible trick.

The Blood Sabre Elder jumped up at once, looking completely vigorous and nimble. It goes without saying that his struggles to get back up earlier were completely bogus. At once he jumped into the hole with both feet and just as quickly got back up again, carrying a person whom he tossed across the expanse of snow. This person was completely drenched in blood, it was none other than Shui Dai. Both his legs including his knees were completely cut off, it was not easy to tell whether he was dead or alive.

When Shui Sheng saw her father in such a horrific state, she cried: "Daddy! Daddy!"

Di Yun could not bear to look at such a sight. He was so startled that he released his hold on Shui Sheng and comforted: "Lady Shui, your father is not dead, he... he is still moving."

The Blood Sabre Elder brandished and raised his left hand, a dark red light shone brilliantly on top of his head spiralling in a circle; he was holding his blood sabre once again. It turns out that when he hid in the snow for such a long time, he secretly cut up a well in the snow and set up a trap. He put the blood sabre horizontally across the hole, the edge of the blade facing upwards. Then he emerged from the snow and pretended to have lost his blade, casting away his opponent's suspicions. Then he boldly ran away and succeeded in luring his enemy to the trap.

Shui Dai had roamed the realm for several dozen years, he was definitely not lacking in experience. It could be said that he knew of all traps that could be employed on land or water. However, in the land of ice and snow he could not protect himself effectively. When he fell into the hole at such a speed with the blood sabre placed across the diameter, his legs were immediately sliced off.

The Blood Sabre Elder held his blood sabre high in the air and shouted to Hua Tiegan: "Do you have any guts yet? Let us fight for 300 stances!"

Hua Tiegan watched as Shui Dai rolled around the surface in excruciating pain and became so intimidated and frightened that his heart nearly cracked open. How could he dare to press forward and attack? He held his short spear close to him and slowly retreated. The red tassel on the tip of the spear trembled repeatedly, revealing how afraid he truly was. The Blood Sabre Elder screamed ferociously and rushed forward two steps. Hua Tiegan immediately retreated two steps, his arms trembling so much that he actually dropped his spear on the ground. He quickly picked it up and moved another two steps back.

The Blood Sabre Elder had consecutively battled three experts without rest, surviving by the skin of his teeth each time. It was truly the case that he was completely exhausted. If he were to fight Hua Tiegan now, he probably could not even last a single stance. Hua Tiegan's martial arts were definitely not inferior; if he were to immediately press forward and attack, the blood sabre monk would definitely die. However, after he mistakenly killed Liu Chengfeng, he was completely dejected and his spirits decreased greatly. Now upon seeing Lu Tianshu beheaded and Shui Dai's legs cut off, he was so scared that his gall nearly exploded, he had not the slightest degree of fighting spirit left in him.

When the Blood Sabre Elder saw how frightened his opponent was, he became even more complacent. "Haha! I have 72 evil ruses, today I have only used three and that was already enough to kill three of your Jiangnan elders. I still have 69 evil ruses left for you!"

Hua Tiegan had experienced many crises in the realm. The exaggerations and boasts of the blood sabre monk actually did not swindle him, but at this point he had already become the bird afraid of the bow. He felt as if every word his enemy uttered and every action he took was full of extreme cruelty and viciousness. He heard the blood sabre monk say he had 69 evil ruses that he intended to use on him, shouting: “I have 69 ruses, 69 ruses!” Hua Tiegan trembled even more as he heard this.

At this point, the Blood Sabre Elder was completely exhausted and found it difficult to continue his bluff. He only wished he could collapse immediately and sleep for a full day and night. But he knew that he was in a life and death situation of utmost intensity and ferocity, definitely not less than what he experienced against Liu Chengfeng or Lu Tianshu. If he were to reveal his weakness even slightly, his opponent would see through his scheme and attack, which would cause him to exhaust his internal energy completely. At this point if his opponent were to press forward with his spear, all he could do was have a vigorous state of mind and fight to the end. He began spiralling his blood sabre in a playful manner, appearing completely at ease. He saw that Hua Tiegan still did not run away and secretly urged: “Coward, run away! Just run away!” But the truth was that Hua Tiegan did not even have the courage to run away.

Shui Dai’s legs were completely sliced off from the knee, he lied down on the floor dying and gasping for breath. When he saw how scared Hua Tiegan was, he was further filled with grief and indignation. Although he suffered fatal injuries, he could still tell that the blood sabre monk had clearly exhausted all his internal energy and only pretended to be vigorous. He gathered up his strength and urged: “Second Brother Hua, fight him. This evil monk has truly exhausted all his energy, killing him would be as easy as flipping your palm. It would be as easy as...”

The Blood Sabre Elder thought: “This old man can see through my weakness, that is not good.” He increased his spirit and pressed forward two steps and boasted to Hua Tiegan: “He’s right. My internal energy is truly exhausted, let us go over to that cliff and battle for 300 stances! Whoever doesn’t go is a turtle bastard’s son!”

Suddenly, from the cave behind him he heard Shui Sheng cry: “Daddy! Daddy!”

The Blood Sabre Elder schemed in his head: “If I kill Shui Dai right now, I will only show my weakness. I should capture the little doll first and force Shui Dai to surrender. Then the one with the surname Hua will have even less will to fight.” He grinned at Hua Tiegan and said: “Are you going or not? How ‘bout 500 stances?”

Hua Tiegan shook his head and retreated another step.

Shui Dai shouted: “Fight with him! Fight with him! Are you not going to avenge Big Brother Lu and Third Brother Liu?”

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed heartily and shouted: “Fight me! Fight me! I still have 69 evil traps ready to be unleashed onto you.” As he said this, he moved closer to the cave and grabbed Shui Sheng by the hair and dragged her across the floor. Even doing this caused him to breathe deeply and he could not even say a word.

He knew that Hua Tiegan had impressive martial arts, so he had no other choice but to execute all kinds of cruelty towards Shui Sheng and her father in an attempt to scare Hua Tiegan away from

fighting him. At once he pulled Shui Sheng in front of her father and shouted: "You said I am out of life energy. Very well then, I will show you if I am really out of life energy!" As he said this he exerted his strength, and with a pull, ripped off a large portion of Shui Sheng's right sleeve, revealing her snow white skin. Shui Sheng shouted in alarm, but because her acupoint was sealed, she was powerless to resist.

Di Yun ran off from the cave and upon seeing such a tragedy, he felt really disturbed and shouted: "Don't... don't hurt Lady Shui!"

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed: "Haha, my obedient grand-disciple, you don't have to worry, your grand-teacher I will not take her life." He turned around and slashed with his sabre, cutting off a piece of flesh from Shui Dai's shoulder and asked: "Is my energy exhausted yet?" Shui Dai's shoulder immediately began to spray out fresh blood. Hua Tiegan and Shui Sheng both cried out in alarm.

Although Hua Tiegan saw that the blood sabre monk's movements were hindered, he thought: "He could be feigning weakness in an attempt to trap me. This evil monk crafty and cunning, I must exercise extreme caution."

The blood sabre monk swiped with his sabre and cut off another piece of flesh on Shui Dai's shoulder, leaving a very deep scar. He yelled: "Why don't you call me 'grandpa'?"

Shui Dai was in so much pain that he nearly passed out, but shouted: "I surnamed Shui would rather die than submit! Just kill me now!"

The Blood Sabre Elder said: "I won't let you die so easily. I will cut the flesh off your arm inch by inch. If you call me 'grandpa' three times and beg for mercy, I will spare your life!"

Shui Dai scolded, "Not even in your mother's wildest dreams!"

The Blood Sabre Elder saw that he was incredibly stubborn and presumed that even if he were to torture him further, he would not surrender, so he yelled: "Very well then, I will torture your daughter, let's see if you call me 'grandpa' then!" As he said this he turned his hand and sliced off half of Shui Sheng's lower garment.

Shui Dai was extremely furious. His vision was covered with darkness and he nearly passed out. He thought: "Brother Hua is scared out of his wits, I cannot die yet. No matter how much the evil monk harasses Sheng'er in front of me, I must keep my emotions in check and prevail to the very end."

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed maliciously and said: "If the one surnamed Hua kneels down and begs for mercy, I will spare his life and allow him to tell everyone in the realm of how I stripped off Lady Shui's clothes completely! Haha, wonderful! Wonderful! Hua Tiegan, you want to surrender? Alright, alright, I will spare your life! The Blood Sabre Elder never harms the ones who surrender!"

When Hua Tiegan heard these words, his fighting spirit became even weaker. He fully intended to flee for his life, but to kneel down and beg for mercy would be much too shameful, although it is still better than having his flesh cut off piece by piece by his enemy. What he did not realize was that if he were to fight right now, he would kill his opponent at once. He only felt that the blood sabre monk in front of him was horrifying and frightening to the extreme. He heard the blood sabre monk assure him: "Don't worry, you don't have to be scared. If you surrender to me, I will spare your life. I

assure you I will not hurt you in the slightest.” These words were spoken like gold to Hua Tiegan, who felt an unspeakable amount of relief and comfort.

The Blood Sabre Elder saw that his opponent’s face showed a bit of hope and did not let the opportunity pass. At once he let go of Shui Sheng and walked towards him with his sabre and said: “A gentleman can submit or stand tall as the situation demands it, very good! If you want to surrender, throw down your spear first. Very good, I will not take your life. I will be your friend, my good brother! Throw down your weapon.” His voice was somewhat soft and comforting.

His words were spoken with an irresistible force. At once, Hua Tiegan let go of his spear and it dropped on the ground. Now that he dropped his weapon, it was clear that he had surrendered. The Blood Sabre Elder smiled and said: “Very good! Very good! You are a good person. Your spear is not bad, let me take a look! Move back three steps. Good, you are very obedient, I definitely won’t kill you, be completely assured. Move back another three steps.” Hua Tiegan obeyed his every command and moved backwards. The Blood Sabre Elder bent down and picked up the spear. When his fingers made contact with the spear, he felt as if all the energy in his body was decreasing. He tried to channel his energy twice but to no avail. He was worried as he thought: “I have fought three consecutive battles against experts, I am truly exhausted. I’m afraid that it will take at least half a month for me to regain my vitality.” Even though he now had spear in hand, he was still nervous. For even if Hua Tiegan was to attack him bare-handed, he would still be defeated immediately.

Shui Dai could only watch as Hua Tiegan surrendered his weapon. He realized that there was no hope left and said softly: “Sheng’er, kill me now!”

Shui Sheng cried: “Daddy... I... I can’t do it!”

Shui Dai looked at Di Yun and said: “Little monk, do a good deed. Kill me now.”

Di Yun understood his intent. He knew that Shui Dai would eventually die anyway. Rather than stay alive and suffer endless insults and humiliations like this, it would be better to just die a quick and painless death. He could not bear to take action. He wanted to end his suffering, but feared that if he were to take action, it would enrage the blood sabre monk. He knew how vicious and cruel this person was, he could not offend him at any cost.

Shui Dai said: “Sheng’er, beg this little monk to kill me. If you delay any further it will be too late...”

Shui Sheng was in a state of conflict and did not know what to do. She said: “Daddy, you can’t die... you can’t die...”

Shui Dai scolded: “I am better off dead than alive! Can’t you see that?”

Shui Sheng was startled then declared: “Right! Daddy, I will die together with you!”

Shui Dai begged Di Yun again. “Little monk, please be benevolent and merciful; kill me now. To ask me to beg the vicious monk for mercy, how can I Shui Dai do such a thing? How can I watch my little girl suffer his humiliations?”

Di Yun saw the heroic qualities of this man and respected him greatly. He was in a state of moral indignation and finally whispered: "Very well, I will kill you. Even if the old monk blames me, I cannot care!"

Shui Dai was delighted by his words. Even though he suffered fatal injuries, his mind was still completely clear as he whispered: "I will curse you loudly, then you can kill me with one attack. The old monk will not punish you." He did not wait for Di Yun's reply and shouted: "Little horny monk! If you don't change your ways, you will follow the path of this old monk and eventually suffer a slow and painful death. If you still have any conscience, then leave the Blood Sabre Clan at once! Little evil monk! Turtle bastard! Repent your past mistakes and turn over a new leaf! Become a good person from now on!"

When Di Yun heard Shui Dai's words he could tell that he had the intention of admonishing him and thanked him greatly. He raised a large twig and swung it around several times, but did not stab him.

Shui Dai became anxious and enraged that the little monk did not take action, and began to curse him even more profusely. He looked askance and saw Hua Tiegan kneeling down and kowtowing to the blood sabre monk.

The Blood Sabre Elder gathered up the remaining energy in his body and concentrated it all on the fingers on his right hand, intending to seal Hua Tiegan's 'Lingtai Acupoint'. This finger was truly filled with all his energy, as soon as he sealed his acupoint he had nothing left. Hua Tiegan fainted as his acupoint was sealed, and the blood sabre monk too began to bend both knees.

Shui Dai saw as Hua Tiegan fell and his heart turned sour. He knew that once he died, there would be no one left to protect Shui Sheng and said inwardly: "My poor Sheng'er..." Then he yelled: "Bastard! Why haven't you killed me yet!"

Di Yun saw as Hua Tiegan collapsed and thought that the Blood Sabre Elder would soon come. At once he clenched his teeth and with all his strength he stabbed the twig right on Shui Dai's head. His skull was cracked immediately, the ill fate of the hero of his generation.

Shui Sheng cried "Daddy!" and immediately passed out.

When the Blood Sabre Elder heard Shui Dai curse repeatedly, he thought that Di Yun could not keep his cool and decided to kill him. However, since Hua Tiegan was already under his control, it did not really matter if Shui Dai was dead or alive. The Blood Sabre Elder was pleased with himself and laughed out loud. There were stutters in his laughter as he kept coughing in between and his legs became more limp and painful. He moved forward a few steps before finally collapsing on the snow.

Hua Tiegan saw this and regretted greatly. "Brother Shui was correct, this monk is truly out of energy. If I realized this sooner I would have killed him at once, why would I have been scared to such an extent? And to kowtow and beg for mercy?" He could be considered a renowned hero of the Central Plains of over a dozen years, yet he fell on my knees and yielded to this most despicable opponent. To only care about his own life was an act of a coward; truly shameless and despicable. As he thought back to this, he was so ashamed he didn't even want to show his face. However, his "Lingtai Acupoint" was sealed and it would be 24 hours before it would release itself. Had the blood sabre monk not revealed his weakness, he would still have chances to live. But now no matter what

he says is intolerable. As soon as Hua Tiegan's acupoint is unsealed, how would he not kill the blood sabre monk at once?

Indeed, he heard the blood sabre monk say: "My grand-disciple, kill him for me. This person is vicious to an extreme, we can't keep him alive."

Hua Tiegan shouted: "You promised to spare my life. You said you never kill those who surrender, how can you go back on your word?" He knew that he was powerless to resist, but in a life and death situation, he had to cling on to any hopes of survival.

The Blood Sabre Elder laughed. "The monks of the Blood Sabre Clan have long turned trust and honour into that of dog shit. That you kowtowed to me and begged for mercy was your own decision. You fell into my trap, haha! My good grand-disciple, kill him now! This person cannot be kept alive, it is extremely dangerous." He was extremely cautious of Hua Tiegan for he knew that the strength he used to seal his acupoint earlier was not even a tenth of his full power. It would not have pierced deeply into his channels. This person has formidable martial arts, so it could be the case that he would be able to break through his sealed acupoint in only several hours. At that point the tables would have turned and he would be at the mercy of his opponent.

Di Yun did not know that the Blood Sabre Elder had completely exhausted his energy and thought: "Earlier I only killed Hero Shui to end his suffering, but this Hero Hua is a good man, why should I kill him?" He replied: "He has already been subdued by you grand-teacher, I think it is better to spare him!"

Hua Tiegan hurriedly replied: "Right! Right! This little monk speaks true words. I have already been subdued without any power to resist, why would you have to kill me?"

Shui Sheng grieved unconsciously in her sleep and cried: "Daddy! Daddy!" When she heard how shameless and despicable Hua Tiegan was acting, she reprimanded: "Uncle Hua, you are also a renowned figure in the martial world, do you have no shame? You only watched as my daddy was tortured... my daddy... daddy..." Her voice was filled with sobs and did not speak anymore.

Hua Tiegan said: "These two monks have profound martial arts, we can't beat them. We should surrender and follow them and comply with all their orders!"

Shui Sheng spat in contempt. "Bah! Bah! You are shameless!"

The Blood Sabre Elder knew that the longer he stalled the more dangerous the situation. At this point he was completely exhausted and could not even get up and move two steps. He said: "My clever grand-disciple, please listen to your grand-teacher's instructions. Kill this man!"

Shui Sheng turned her head around and saw her father's head was badly mutilated and died an extremely painful death. As she thought of his affection and care for her, she nearly passed out again. Although Shui Sheng heard with her very own ears how her father begged for Di Yun to end his suffering, at this point she was so sad that she forgot it all completely. She only knew that Di Yun was the one who killed her father with a stick, splattering his brains everywhere. She could no longer hold back the grief and indignation in her heart, and felt a surge of warm energy rise from her pubic region.



Those who have cultivated their internal energy to a really high degree are capable of overcoming their own sealed acupoints through a surge of energy, but to practice to such an extent is no small task. Hua Tiegan was not even capable of doing this, so how could Shui Sheng? However, when someone is faced with a calamity, an unusual extreme surge of emotions may cause one to release one's hidden capabilities. It is often the case that in a life and death situation, someone can perform a task that they would normally find nearly impossible. At this point, Shui Sheng was so miserable that her energy surged up and unsealed her acupoint. She did not know from where she got such a surge of energy, but immediately she got up and picked up the stick beside her father's corpse and aimed to attack Di Yun.

Di Yun urgently dodged left and right. Although he managed to protect his vital areas, his face, shoulders, ears, and the back of his head were struck 12 or 13 times in succession. He extended his arms to block and said: "Why are you hitting me? It was your father who begged me to kill him."

Shui Sheng trembled as she heard this and realized that he was correct. She was stunned and her surge of energy dissipated as she collapsed on the floor and wailed.

When the Blood Sabre Elder heard Di Yun say "It was your father who begged me to kill him," he understood the whole truth behind the story. He became furious and thought: "This little brat dares assist his opponent, he is going against me!" At once he wanted to pick up his blood sabre to kill him, but even the slightest movement of his arm caused his entire arm and shoulder to be filled with pain. Under such paralysis he remained calm and collected and said: "My good grand-disciple, look after this little doll and don't let her go crazy. She is yours now, you can do whatever you want to her. Your grand-teacher will not say a word."

Hua Tiegan came up with an idea and shouted: "Niece Shui, come over here. I have something to say to you." He knew that the blood sabre monk was completely exhausted and was no longer cause for concern and Di Yun was crippled. Of the four people here, she was the one with most energy and he had to ask her to kill the two monks.

However, Shui Sheng despised him greatly for his despicable actions and thought: "If you did not surrender your spear, my father would not have died." When she heard Hua Tiegan's words, she ignored them completely.

Hua Tiegan continued: "Niece Shui, if you want to get out of this mess there is only one way. Come over here, I will tell you."

The Blood Sabre Elder cursed: "What nonsense are you speaking? If you don't shut up I am going to kill you with my sabre."

Hua Tiegan did not dare to confront him directly and winked at Shui Sheng consistently to signal her. Shui Sheng scolded: "Whatever you have to say, just speak up. Why be so secretive?"

Hua Tiegan thought: "This old monk is currently trying to channel and recover his energy. If he even regains a tenth of his strength, he would be able to pick up his sabre and kill me. There's no time, I have to speak now." Then he said: "Niece Shui, look at this old monk. After so many battles, he has completely exhausted his internal energy, he can't even pick himself up." Even though he knew that the blood sabre monk was powerless to attack him, he still did not dare to disrespect him and only referred to him as "old monk".

Shui Sheng took a look at the blood sabre monk and saw that he indeed collapsed on the floor and looked to be in a very sorry state. As she thought of taking revenge for her father's death, she no longer cared whether Hua Tiegan spoke true words or not. At once she picked up the twig and aimed to attack the blood sabre monk.

When the blood sabre monk heard Hua Tiegan repeatedly urge Shui Sheng, he already knew what was going to happen next. With a sense of great urgency he came up with ideas in his head and thought: "If this little doll comes to attack me, what will I do?" He tried to channel his energy twice but felt that his pubic region was completely empty and even felt weaker than before. He could not come up with a plan at once as Shui Sheng approached him, twig in hand.

Shui Sheng was especially skilled with long swords and was not used to using sticks. However, urgently trying to take revenge for her father, she just concentrated on using her full strength to attack and revealed weakness on her underarm. The blood sabre monk slanted sideways intending to strike with Hua Tiegan's short spear that he was holding in his hand. However, he was indeed much too weak; even turning the spear around proved to be a task too difficult to overcome. He could only exert all his strength to attack with the tail of the spear, aiming at her "Dabao Acupoint" near her underarm. Shui Sheng, overcome with grief and sorrow, did not expect this counterattack. The twig hit its target square on the face and lacerated his flesh, but at the same time she felt a numbness in her underarm and lost all her strength and fell forward.

The blood sabre monk was hit hard with the twig which caused him to nearly pass out. However, his trick succeeded as Shui Sheng voluntarily made contact with the pole of the spear with her underarm and sealed her own acupoint. The Blood Sabre Elder laughed heartily: "The one surnamed Hua, you said I am completely exhausted of energy, then how was I able to subdue her?" The way he matched Shui Sheng's arm with the pole of the spear causing her to seal her own acupoint was obstructed by their two bodies, so Hua Tiegan and Di Yun did not see what happened and actually thought that he sealed her acupoint by force.

Hua Tiegan was completely startled and did not know what to say. "Elder truly has profound martial arts, I am merely an ordinary folk with the view of a frog. I truly did not expect this. Elder has such profound internal energy and could be said to be unrivalled in this world, truly unprecedented and matchless." His words were filled with flattery and compliments, but his words trembled; he had never felt so much fear before.

The Blood Sabre Elder thought to himself: "Shameless!" He knew that he was safe for the time being, but he only sealed Shui Sheng's acupoint with external force and not with his own finger strength. He knew that this seal could not have penetrated deeply into her acupoint and knew that her acupoint would release itself before long. Such a fortunate occurrence could only happen once and not again. If she were to pick up the blood sabre to kill him, even if he were to try and seal her acupoint with the spear a second time, he would have been beheaded a long time ago. He could only wait to regain a portion of his internal energy during this short period and kill Shui Sheng before her acupoint unseals itself. However, how could the recovery of internal energy be forced? In the face of a disaster, he did not say a word and lied down in a position to recover. At this point it was not even possible for him to sit on his knees nor did he dare to open his eyes. He was afraid of any distractions by the other three.

Di Yun's head, shoulders, hands, and legs all suffered injuries. He could only clench his teeth and groan inwardly. His mind was in a state of chaos and he could not think clearly. Shui Sheng lied down on the ground only a few feet away from the blood sabre. At first because she was hasty, she did not know what the blood sabre monk was planning to do. Now after a good while she saw that the blood sabre monk did not move and felt relieved. She could hardly bear the sorrow in her heart and could not wait to avenge her father. After a while, she drifted into a lethargic sleep.

The Blood Sabre Elder was delighted as he thought: "Hopefully you will sleep for several hours, that will be enough."

Hua Tiegan looked at Di Yun, not knowing whether he was feeling his own guilty conscience or confused as he did not harbour any intention of taking action, leaving all eyes on whether Shui Sheng would be able to kill the blood sabre monk before he recovers. He called out: "Niece Shui, don't fall asleep! These two perverted monks want to hurt you!" But Shui Sheng was exhausted and moaned a few times in her sleep, how could she be awoken? Hua Tiegan yelled: "This is not good, wake up quickly! The evil monk wants to take off your pants!"

The Blood Sabre Elder was enraged and thought, "To let him shout and quarrel like this is extremely dangerous." and at once said to Di Yun: "My good grand-disciple, kill that old man with one slash."

Di Yun said: "This person has already surrendered, we don't need to kill him."

The Blood Sabre Elder reasoned: "How has he surrendered? Listen to him make a racket, he wants to hurt the two of us."

Hua Tiegan added: "Little monk, your grand-teacher is most vicious. Right now he does not have any energy left and can't move, that's why he's telling you to kill me. However, once he regains his energy he will kill you for not listening to his orders. Why don't you make the first move and kill him?"

Di Yun shook his head and replied: "He is not my grand-teacher, only that he has saved my life and has been kind to me. How can I kill him?"

Hua Tiegan said: "He is not your grand-teacher? Then you must take action at once or it will be too late. The evil monks of the Blood Sabre Clan are ferocious and ruthless without any feelings and sensibilities. Don't you want to live?" In a moment of desperation, he no longer cared about showing any respect to the blood sabre monk.

Di Yun hesitated to take action. He knew that Hua Tiegan spoke true words but for him to kill the blood sabre monk, he could not bear to do such a thing. But upon hearing the consistent persuasions of Hua Tiegan, he became impatient and warned: "If you keep talking I will kill you first."

Hua Tiegan knew that the situation was unfavourable and did not dare to speak further. He only hoped that Shui Sheng would wake up soon. After a while, he shouted again: "Shui Sheng, Shui Sheng, your daddy is alive! Your daddy is alive!"

In a daze, Shui Sheng unconsciously heard someone shout “Your daddy is alive!” and full of delight, she immediately woke up and shouted: “Daddy! Daddy!”

Hua Tiegan said: “Niece Shui, which acupoint of yours has been sealed? This evil monk has no energy left, it is no big deal. I will teach you how to inhale and the technique to rush through your sealed acupoint.”

Shui Sheng said: “My left underarm and my ribs are numb, I can’t move at all.”

Hua Tiegan said: “So he has sealed your ‘Dabao Acupoint’. That is easy then, just breathe and focus on your pubic region. Slowly channel your breath to rush through the ‘Dabao Acupoint’ on your left underarm. After you unseal your acupoint, you can avenge your father.”

Shui Sheng nodded her head and replied, “Yes!” Although she still resented Hua Tiegan greatly, after all he is still on her side and his techniques are beneficial. So she did as told and inhaled, focusing on her pubic region.

The Blood Sabre Elder gazed attentively for any activity and saw that she nodded her head to Hua Tiegan’s words. He whined inwardly: “This little doll nodded and will definitely rush through her acupoint. It won’t even take the time of one incense stick before she is free.” At once he focused his eyes on his nose and his nose in his heart. Whether Shui Sheng would be able to successfully take action, that he had no control over. All he could do was focus on recuperating his own energy.

The technique of channelling your energy to rush through an acupoint is indeed profound. Even Hua Tiegan himself would not be capable of such a task, how could Shui Sheng be successful only after a few words of instructions? However, her sealed acupoint followed the flow of her blood vessels and had gradually unblocked itself automatically; it was not that she was able to channel her energy to rush through it. After a while, she was able to move her back slightly. Hua Tiegan was delighted and said: “Niece Shui, this is good. Just keep using that technique and you will be moving in no time.”

Shui Sheng nodded her head and felt the numbness in her arm gradually decrease. She exhaled a deep breath and brought herself up.

Hua Tiegan said: “Excellent! Niece Shui, you must listen to my every instruction in sequence without any mistake, otherwise it will be difficult for you to take revenge. First, pick up the curved sabre on the ground.”

Shui Sheng slowly extended her hand beside the blood sabre monk and picked up the blood sabre.

Di Yun watched her every action and knew that the next step was to behead the blood sabre monk in one slash. But he saw that the blood sabre monk’s eyes were tightly shut without paying any attention to his dangerous situation.

The Blood Sabre Elder felt the energy in his hands and feet began to recover slightly. He would need another hour or so before he was able to use any strength and move freely. However, Shui Sheng had already picked up the blood sabre and was about to attack. At once he focused all the remaining energy in his body to his left arm.

Hua Tiegan said: "The second step is to kill the little monk. Go quickly! Kill him now!"

This command caused Shui Sheng, the blood sabre monk, and Di Yun to all be taken back by surprise. Hua Tiegan continued: "The old monk can't move. It is important that you kill the little monk first. If you kill the old monk, the little monk will try and stop you!"

Shui Sheng understood that he was correct. At once she raised her sabre and walked in front of Di Yun. She hesitated as she thought: "He helped end my daddy's suffering against the evil monk. Should I kill him or not?" She only hesitated for a moment before she decided: "Of course I should!" She raised her sabre intending to slash Di Yun by the neck.

Di Yun urgently evaded the attack. Shui Sheng slashed a second time but Di Yun dodged again. He picked up a twig from the ground and defended against her sabre. Shui Sheng hacked with her sabre three times and broke the twig into two pieces. At once she wanted to attack again, when suddenly she felt tension around her wrist; someone had grabbed her blood sabre from behind.

The one who took her sabre was the blood sabre monk. He had limited energy and could not attack freely, but saw the urgency of the situation and exerted his energy to retrieve the blood sabre. Further beyond expectations, he followed by brandishing the sabre to slash her neck. Shui Sheng was startled as she evaded the blow.

Di Yun yelled: "Don't kill anymore!" He pounced himself forward and with twig in hand he attacked the Blood Sabre Elder by the wrist. If it was a normal situation, how could the Blood Sabre Elder ever be stricken by his attack? However this was a special circumstance and his martial arts was not even a twentieth of what it normally was. His fingers retreated and he dropped the blood sabre. The two of them went to pick up the weapon at the same time. Di Yun was first with his palm on the ground grasping onto the handle of the sabre. The Blood Sabre Elder raised both his hands intending to snap his neck in half.

Di Yun choked and let go of his hold on the blood sabre. He extended his hands and tried to struggle free. The Blood Sabre Elder knew that he did not have much energy left. If he could not strangle Di Yun immediately, he would lose his life. He did not realize that Di Yun had no intention of hurting him and was only attacking to protect Shui Sheng. Di Yun's neck was being strangled by the blood sabre monk and he found it increasing difficult to breathe and felt as if his chest was about to pop. He turned his hands over and exerted all his strength hoping to push the blood sabre monk away.

The Blood Sabre Elder thought that the little monk had the intention of rebelling. According to the rules of the Blood Sabre Clan, he should first kill the traitor before killing his enemies. He knew that Hua Tiegan could not join in the fight at this time and that Shui Sheng was only a girl with limited capabilities, so he focused all his remaining energy to strangle Di Yun.

Di Yun's face turned purple as he found it difficult to breathe. He had no energy in his hands to retaliate and slowly began to hang down with only one thought in mind: "I am about to die! I am about to die!"

When Shui Sheng saw the two of them rolling about on the snow like this, she knew that it was all because Di Yun wanted to save her. However, she thought that for these two monks to massacre one another was not bad at all, hoping that the two of them would both suffer injuries and die together. After watching for a while, she saw that Di Yun's hands and feet were dangling, he did not

have any energy left to defend himself. She could not help but be startled and thought: “After the evil monk kills the little monk, he will kill me next. What can I do?”

Hua Tiegan called: “Niece Shui, this is a golden opportunity. Pick up the curved sabre!” Shui Sheng followed his instructions and picked up the blood sabre. Hua Tiegan continued: “Go over there and kill both monks!”

Shui Sheng raised her sabre and walked forward a few steps. On one hand she wanted to kill the Blood Sabre Elder, but when she saw him tangling with Di Yun, she knew that the blood sabre was capable of slicing iron like mud, if she were to strike she would kill the both of them. She recalled that Di Yun saved her life before. Even though this little monk was vicious, to kill the one who saved her was still an immoral action to take. Hence she decided to kill the blood sabre monk only, but her hands and legs were numb and she was not confident.

Amidst her hesitation, Hua Tiegan said: “You must take action now. If you delay any further you will lose the opportunity to avenge your father.”

Shui Sheng said: “These two monks are tangled together and are inseparable.”

Hua Tiegan scolded: “You are so silly. I told you to kill them both!” He was a renowned hero in the realm and was the leader of the Eagle Claw Iron Spear Clan. He was used to giving orders to people, expecting them to be followed. However, he forgot that at this moment he was helpless and Shui Sheng also resented him greatly.

When she heard such an egotistical and irritable command, she became frustrated and actually moved back three steps! She shouted: “Hmph! You are a hero and a towering figure, why did you not fight a battle to the death against the blood sabre monk earlier? If you have any skills, kill him yourself!”

Hua Tiegan knew that the situation was unfavourable and smiled. “My good niece, it is Uncle Hua who was confused, please don’t be angry. But you must kill those two monks in order to avenge your father. The Blood Sabre Elder is such a remarkable evil, if he dies by your hands and news of this spreads out, how would everyone in the realm not respect you as filial and the matchless heroine of the era?” However, the more he spoke of flattery the angrier Shui Sheng became. She glared at Hua Tiegan and moved forward. She aimed precisely at the blood sabre monk’s back intending to slash him twice. That way he would just bleed to death while Di Yun remains unharmed.

The Blood Sabre Elder did not let go of his grip on Di Yun even slightly and was also constantly turning his head, paying attention to Shui Sheng’s every movement. When he saw that Shui Sheng brandished the sabre he realized her intentions and spoke softly: “If you slash me twice from behind, you must be careful not to hurt the little monk.”

Shui Sheng was startled by these words; she dreaded and feared the blood sabre monk greatly. When she heard him encourage her to attack him, she thought that he must have harboured malicious intentions and did not listen. However, she did not expect that the blood sabre monk was only telling the truth sometimes while other times he was bluffing. She stared blankly and did not dare to attack.

Di Yun was strangled tightly by the blood sabre monk, his lungs gathered a breath of air in an attempt to exhale through his nose, but because the pathways on his throat were completely obstructed, once the breath of air reached his throat it fell back down. This breath of air crashed and dashed left and right inside his body without any way of finding an exit. If it was an ordinary person, in such a circumstance that person would have gradually fainted, eventually dying of suffocation. However, at this moment he actually had no way of fainting and only felt his entire body suffer an extremely painful feeling of being trapped within itself. He thought: "I am going to die soon. I am going to die soon!"

All of a sudden, he felt an intense pain in the area between his chest and stomach. This breath of air bloated larger and larger and warmer and warmer, like that of steam bursting out of a filled cauldron, rushing out of his body until his stomach was about to explode. Unexpectedly, the "Huiyin Acupoint" between his front and back appeared to have pierced a small hole by this warm surge of energy. He felt a faint surge of warm energy going from his "Perineum Acupoint" to the "Changqiang Acupoint" near the tip of his vertebra. In a person's body, the two acupoints of "Perineum" and "Changqiang" were separated by a distance of no more than a few inches. However, the "Perineum Acupoint" belonged to the "Ren" meridian while the "Changqiang Acupoint" belonged to the "Du" meridian; the energies of the two meridians were simply not interlinked. However, the energy inside his body, compounded by the inability to release his own energy at this point caused a tremendous amount of energy to crash against each other. It went so far as to storming its way out in such a crucial situation, allowing him to open access and interlink his "Ren" meridian and "Du" meridian.

This breath of air ventured into the "Changqiang Acupoint" and immediately acceded to the various acupoints of his lower back; the "Yangmen", "Mingmen", and "Xuanshu" acupoints followed the path of the vertebra and surged upward, flowing according to the various important acupoints of the Ren and Du meridians, then it went down his spine hitting the various "Zhongshu", "Jinsuo", "Zhiyang", "Lingtai", "Shendao", "Shenzhu", "Taodao", "Dachui", "Koumen", "Fengfu", "Naohu", "Qiangjian", and "Houding" acupoints until it reached the "Baihui Acupoint" on the top of his head.

During his time in prison, Di Yun received the mnemonics to the Heavenly Glow from Ding Dian. This internal technique was utmost profound and difficult to practice and his martial arts aptitude was not exceptionally high. Later on he no longer had Ding Dian to give him pointers, he may not be able to master it even in another 20 or 30 years. Who would have thought that in a life and death situation he would be able to interlink his Ren and Du meridians? Firstly, it was because that his throat was being strangled that his breath of air could not exhale itself and had to find an exit at any cost. Secondly, he had previously practiced the unorthodox internal energy techniques in the Blood Sabre Sutra; the path through which his internal energy channelled itself was opposite that of the techniques of the Heavenly Glow Sutra and it served to help him rush through with his energy and remove the obstruction.

Once this surge of energy reached the "Baihui Acupoint", he felt a cool sensation on his face; a surge of cool air starting from his forehead down to the bridge of his nose and his lips and down to the "Chengjiang Acupoint" on his chin. This Chengjiang Acupoint belonged to the Ren meridian and returned to the Du meridian. The various acupoints of the Ren meridian were placed at the front of the body, this surge of cool energy made its way down to the "Zilian" and "Tiantu" acupoints and followed to the "Xuanji", "Huagai", "Zigong", "Yutang", "Shanzhong", "Zhongting", "Jiuwei", and "Jueque" acupoints. The three internal cavities of the stomach had moisture content; the "Shenjue", "Qihai", "Shimen", "Guanyuan", "Zhongji", and "Qugu" acupoints all returned to the "Perineum

Acupoint”. For all his acupoints to link together like this without being shut caused an indescribable carefree sensation around his entire body. Initially, it was difficult for him to channel his energy this way, but with the Ren and Du meridians interlinked, the path became unhindered. The second and third time his energy was channelled at lightning speed, and an instant it had gone through his body 18 times.

The internal energy techniques of the Heavenly Glow were matchless under heaven. He had practiced this for a while since his time in prison. At this instant he felt completely unhindered, every time his energy was channelled for a whole cycle and his strength would increase by a percent. He felt the four limbs and hundreds of bones in his body all filled with vigour and strength, flourishing at copious amounts. He felt that even the roots of his hair were felt with an abundance of energy.

How would the blood sabre monk know that even with his ten fingers strangling his opponent, his body would go through such a tremendous change? He at once increased his grip on Di Yun’s throat while at the same time being cautious of the blood sabre on Shui Sheng’s hands.

Di Yun’s internal strength became stronger and stronger. He felt very afraid and only wanted to struggle himself free, he clawed and scratched frantically, eventually hitting the blood sabre monk. His left leg kicked backwards frantically several times, when all of a sudden he managed to kick the blood sabre monk on his lower stomach. This kick was filled with tremendous power, the blood sabre monk had already exhausted all his energy beforehand, how could he have any power to resist? At once his body soared in midair like that of mist amongst clouds.

Shui Sheng and Hua Tiegang were both startled by the turn of events and did not know how it happened. They only saw as the Blood Sabre Elder was sent flying, rotating in midair before landing head first on the ground. His body submerged several feet into the snow and only his legs could be seen above the surface, not moving the slightest.



## Chapter 8 – Feather Coat



*He walked in front of the cave and threw the feather coat on the ground. Then he trampled over it several times and shouted: "I am a vicious monk, how am I deserving of wearing young lady's clothing?" With a flying kick he sent the feather coat flying inside the cave, then he turned around and laughed wildly as he strode his way out.*

Shui Sheng and Hua Tiegan were expressionless, not knowing from where the blood sabre monk could unleash such remarkable martial arts.

Di Yun gasped for breath as his throat was let loose. He wanted to stay alive and jumped up at once, but his right leg was still broken and he let out an “Ayo!” before falling back down again. He supported himself with his right hand and got up with his left leg. He saw the Blood Sabre Elder with both legs facing the sky and his head sunk inside the snow. He did not understand what happened and rubbed his eyes to take a closer look. All he saw was that the Blood Sabre Elder was stuck head first in the snow without the slightest trace of movement.

When Di Yun jumped up, Shui Sheng was afraid that he would hurt her and brandished her sabre in front of her a few times and retreated a few steps. She fixed her gaze on him completely and watched his every move. All she saw was a confused expression stretched across his entire face as he scratched his head in perplexity.

All of a sudden, Hua Tiegan complimented: “This little monk’s divine martial arts are matchless, truly unrivalled in this world. You managed to kill that old perverted monk with one simple kick. Such a kick must have contained the power of at least a thousand pounds! This act of chivalry has really earned my utmost respect.”

As Shui Sheng heard up to this point she could not bear it anymore and scolded: “Stop blabbering nonsense, don’t you think people will feel disgusted when they hear it?”

Hua Tiegan said: “That blood sabre monk was vicious and cruel to the extreme, everyone wants to kill him. This little monk placed righteousness before family and rid the world of such a menace, truly a remarkable accomplishment. Such an act of greatness is hard to come by and is truly gratifying.” He saw that both legs of the blood sabre monk were stiff as a corpse and it was obvious that he was dead. At once he began to flatter and praise Di Yun.

Although his personality was somewhat shady, but in his life he had done many heroic deeds and had a sense of justice, never had he committed any act of evil. Otherwise, how could he have sworn brotherhood with Lu Tianshu, Liu Chengfeng, and Shui Dai for over a dozen years? However, today he accidentally killed one of his sworn brothers Liu Chengfeng and his state of mind suffered a surge; his normal heroic spirit disappeared in a flash. Furthermore, he was humiliated greatly by the blood sabre monk, causing his many years of repressed vile and repulsive character to suddenly emerge all at once. In only the span of a few hours, it was as if he had become a completely different person.

Di Yun said: “You said... you said I... I kicked him to death?”

Hua Tiegan said: “That is without a doubt. If little monk does not believe it, you can slice off his legs with the blood sabre and then lift him up to see if he’s really dead or not.” At this point, every scheme he considered was filled with malicious intents.

Di Yun gave a sideways glance at Shui Sheng. Shui Sheng knew that he wanted to take the blood sabre from her and retreated another step in fright. Di Yun shook his head and said: “You don’t have to be scared, I won’t hurt you. Just now you didn’t kill me along with the old monk, you have my gratitude.” Shui Sheng groaned but did not respond.

Hua Tiegan said: "Niece Shui, you are acting incorrectly. This little monk wants to express his gratitude, you should thank him in return. Earlier the old vicious monk wanted to kill you, if not for the little monk's tenderness towards women, he would not have risked his life to save you, then how would you still be alive?"

When Shui Sheng and Di Yun both heard him say the words "tenderness towards women" they both gave him a glance. Although Shui Sheng was indeed a beautiful young lady, when Di Yun saved her, he was only concerned about "saving an innocent life". The way Hua Tiegan spoke suggested that Di Yun actually harboured malicious intentions. Shui Sheng was already extremely suspicious around Di Yun, now upon hearing Hua Tiegan's words, it only served to reinforce her hatred towards him. She could not tell whether she hated Hua Tiegan or Di Yun more, she only knew that they were both crafty and evil people. As she gazed upon her father's corpse, she could not help but feel heartbroken and rushed towards the corpse and began to cry.

Hua Tiegan smiled and asked: "Little monk, may I ask for your religious name?"

Di Yun replied: "I am not a monk, do not call me one. I only wore this monk outfit to disguise myself, I had no other choice."

Hua Tiegan was delighted and said: "That is wonderful. So little monk is actually not... no, no! Damn it! Damn it! May I ask for hero's honourable name?"

Although Shui Sheng was crying, she heard their conversation very clearly. When she heard that Di Yun was actually not a monk, she became skeptical. She heard Di Yun reply: "My surname is Di, I am an unknown nonentity, a person who has many times narrowly escaped from the brink of death. How can you call me a hero?"

Hua Tiegan remarked: "Excellent! Excellent! Hero Di is brave and courageous, a perfect match for my talented Niece Shui. Looks like I will definitely have to play matchmaker. Wonderful! Wonderful! So it turns out that Hero Di is actually not a monk. Once your hair grows back and you change your clothes, then there will be no mistake about it, and we don't have to worry about having you leave a monastic order." He had already affirmed that Di Yun was a monk from the Blood Sabre Clan who only cared about Shui Sheng's beauty without even realizing it.

Di Yun shook his head and replied: "Do not speak such nonsense. If we can get out of this valley, I will never see you again, nor will I ever see Lady Shui again."

Hua Tiegan was stumped for words and did not understand his meaning. At once he changed his attitude and laughed: "Oh, I understand. I understand!"

Di Yun glared at him and asked: "You understand what?"

Hua Tiegan spoke softly: "Hero Di must be in an intimate relationship with another beauty from your monastery so you are unwilling to take Lady Shui as your wife. Hehe, you can still be man and wife for several days, why not?"

Shui Sheng found it hard to suppress her anger when she heard these words *Slap! Slap Slap! Slap!* She ran over to Hua Tiegan and slapped him hard on the face four times. Di Yun watched blankly as

he thought that all of this had nothing to do with him. After a while, the Blood Sabre Elder still did not move in the slightest.

Several times, Shui Sheng watched to go forward and cut off his legs with her sabre, but she did not dare to. She only watched as her father lied motionless on the ground, knowing that she would never feel his affection ever again, and cried softly: “Daddy! Daddy!” Obviously, Shui Dai did not reply. Shui Sheng’s tears dripped on the snow and melted it slightly, thereafter it merged with the snow and became ice.

Because Hua Tiegan’s acupoint was not yet released, he flattered Di Yun to get on his good side. The more he spoke, the more sappy his words became. Di Yun ignored him and lied down on the snow to rest. After Di Yun successfully interlinked his Ren and Du meridians, he felt very invigorated, a warm current passing through the insides of his body. From the front of his chest to his back, the energy kept on channelling in a continuous cycle. Every time it completed one cycle, he would feel energy all over his body. Although he was still in great pain from the injuries he received from Shui Sheng, because his internal energy increased greatly, he could repress it somewhat. He was afraid of such a strange occurrence, coming and going just like that. At once he lied down motionless and let the Ren and Du meridians channel its energy automatically.

Shui Sheng got up and slowly moved towards the Blood Sabre Elder and saw that the monk was completely lifeless. Gathering up her courage, she brandished the sabre and sliced off his left leg. A small slashing sound was heard as the leg promptly fell on the ground. However, what was strange was that it did not bleed at all. Shui Sheng looked closely and realized that the blood had clotted to ice. It turns out that the blood sabre monk really died some time ago.

Shui Sheng was both delighted and sad. She held on to the blood sabre around her leg and thought: “Now that my daddy is dead, I don’t want to live anymore! How will this vicious little monk torture me? If he wants to violate me in any way, I will kill myself at once.”

Hua Tiegan watched closely at their actions and was delighted as he thought: “Although this little monk is vicious, he currently has no intention of killing me. As soon as my acupoint is unsealed, I will take his life, even that little doll Shui Sheng will be mine.” All these despicable thoughts rushed to his head at once.

After an hour or so, Di Yun realized that his flow of energy still did not stop channelling, so he began to channel his energy according to the methods of the Heavenly Glow taught by Ding Dian. At once, the uncontrollable surges of energy inside his body were now in his control, it was as easy as nodding his head or raising his hand. He felt both surprised and delighted.

After channelling his energy for half a day, he stood up and with the support of a twig, walked towards the blood sabre monk. He saw that his body was completely in the snow while both legs were badly mutilated by Shui Sheng. It was without a doubt that he was dead. Di Yun thought that this person was wicked and evil and deserved to die, but after all he was benevolent towards him and he could not help but feel sorry. So he decided to pull out his corpse and place it firmly on the ground, then buried it with snow. Although it was hasty, it could still be considered a burial place. As for why the blood sabre monk suddenly died, Di Yun was perplexed without the slightest clue. This person’s martial arts was profound, there’s no way that he died from one simple kick.

Shui Sheng watched Di Yun's actions closely. She saw several bald eagles spiralling in the sky with the intention of scavenging on her father's corpse, so she imitated Di Yun and buried her father. At first, she wanted to bury Liu Chengfeng and Lu Tianshu as well, but one died on top of a cliff and the other died on the deepest parts of the valley; she realized she was incapable of retrieving them and did not bother.

Hua Tiegan said: "Little monk, the three of us must be really tired and hungry by now. Earlier I saw there was horse meat at the top, may I request that you bring it here. After we eat we can come up with a plan to get out of here."

Di Yun knew of his personality and did not respond. Hua Tiegan pleaded repeatedly but to no avail. Shui Sheng said: "That meat belongs to my horse, it cannot be eaten by such a shameless person." Di Yun nodded in approval and gave a glance at Hua Tiegan.

Hua Tiegan urged: "Little monk..."

Di Yun said: "I already told you that I am not a monk, stop calling me that."

Hua Tiegan said: "Right, right. Hero Di. Hero Di has successfully killed the blood sabre monk with one kick, you will most certainly be renowned throughout the world. When I get out of this valley, the first thing I'll do is announce to everyone everything that happened today: The great Hero Di dashed on bravely with no regard for his own personal safety, willing to rescue Lady Shui at any cost and killed the blood sabre monk. This is an act that will be top news across the martial world."

Di Yun said: "I am a prisoner, nameless and without reputation, who would believe your words? You should really stop talking now."

Hua Tiegan said: "My humble name has a little bit of reputation in the realm. If I speak out, people will believe me for sure. Hero Di, may I request that you retrieve the horse meat and give me a piece to eat."

Di Yun became fed up and scoffed: "Why should I give you horse meat? In the future you will say how worthless I am. Who do you think I am? Can I be bestowed upon such a name?" As he thought of all the injustices and cruelty he suffered throughout the years, he could not suppress his anger and resentment.

Hua Tiegan did not actually want to eat the piece of horse meat. Although he was indeed hungry, but what was it to go without food with a day or so? He was only afraid that the little evil monk would flare up and kill him. To ask for horse meat is pressing by retreating, attacking by defending. He did not expect that the monk would not get the meat for him. His heart began to feel apologetic and lost all of his murderous intent.

Di Yun saw that the sky was turning dark, the west wind blowing swiftly into the valley. He said to Shui Sheng: "Lady Shui, why don't you take a rest inside the cave?"

Shui Sheng was startled and thought he harboured malicious intent. At once she retreated two steps and held tightly onto her blood sabre horizontally in a defensive position. She shouted: "Little vicious monk, if you take another step I will kill myself!"

Di Yun stared blankly and replied: "Please do not be mistaken, how would I harbour any evil intentions?"

Shui Sheng said: "You little monk have a face of a human but the heart of a beast, a dagger hidden in smiles. You are even more vicious than the old monk. I won't fall for your tricks."

Di Yun was unwilling to think further and thought: "As soon as the sky turns bright tomorrow I will get out of here. What Lady Shui or Hero Hua, I will never see either of them ever again." At once he stationed himself far away and slept on a large rock.

Shui Sheng thought that the further the monk went, the craftier and evil he was. She thought that it was a scheme and that he intended to violate her in the middle of the night. She did not dare to rest inside the cave for fear that she would not have an escape route when the monk arrives. She was so frightened and felt as if she was in a battlefield as she held the blood sabre firmly on her right hand. Her eyelids began to droop down and she reminded herself: "I can't fall asleep, this monk is extremely vicious."

But she was both mentally and physically exhausted, how could she not sleep? Gradually, she grew hazy and drifted into a sleep.

When she was conscious again she felt the brightness of early morning sun irritate her eyes. She woke up at once and saw that the blood sabre was no longer in her hands. She became alarmed and looked around, but saw that the blood sabre remained untouched beside her leg.

Shui Sheng picked up the blood sabre at once. She raised her head and saw that Di Yun was moving in a faraway place, holding a twig in hand, slowly making his way out of the valley. Shui Sheng was delighted, and thanked heavens that he was going to leave.

Indeed, Di Yun was trying to find a way out of the valley. However, there were no paths out from the north or northeast direction, while the other three directions were surrounded by the walls of the cliff. It was evident that there was no way out, there was no point in trying. There was a small probability that there could be an exit in the southeast direction, but the accumulation of snow was over a hundred feet deep. There would be no hope to escape until the snow begins to melt and his leg begins to heal. He had been exhausted for over half a day, and upon staring blankly at the peaks of the valley, he felt dismayed.

Hua Tiegan asked, "Hero Di, how is it?"

Di Yun shook his head and replied, "There is no way out."

Hua Tiegan thought: "You may not be able to get out, but how can I, Hua Tiegan, be compared with a little monk like you? Come afternoon when my acupoint unblocks itself, you will witness my power." His expression did not change the slightest as he said: "Don't worry, wait until my acupoint unblocks itself, I will be able to us out of here."

Shui Sheng realized that Di Yun had never violated her in any way and her anger began to diminish. However, she still remained vigilant and kept a good distance away from him without even saying a word. Di Yun did not beseech her to understand him either, but when he saw how she was treating him, he felt resentful and only hoped that he could get out of here sooner. However, the snow

covered the mountain completely and there was simply no way out. He could not help but become disappointed.

When afternoon came, Hua Tiegan suddenly laughed out loud and said: "Niece Shui, your uncle wants to eat a few pounds of your horse meat. After we get out of here, I will return the favour." He got up at once and made his way to the roasted horse meat, took a piece and began eating it. It turns out that his acupoint automatically released itself after some time.

As soon as Hua Tiegan's acupoint was released, he became more arrogant and overbearing. He thought that since the Blood Sabre Elder was already dead, even if Di Yun and Shui Sheng were to join forces to fight him, they would not be his match. However, it would still be best to get out of the valley as soon as possible, and when that time comes, he would first kill Di Yun and then deal with Shui Sheng. Even if he were to not kill her, he would still intimate her so that she would not speak out her mind. All the despicable deeds he did yesterday, how could he let it be revealed to the outside world?

He executed his lightness martial arts to examine his surroundings. He saw that the snow from the avalanche earlier sealed the valley completely. If he and the other members of Luohua Liushui did not rush in before the avalanche, they would have been trapped outside with no way in. At this point, all the paths out of the valley were covered by piles of snow which were over a hundred feet deep and stretched over a few kilometers wide. It is possible that he could travel under the snow up to a hundred feet or so, but how could he stay under for several kilometers? Besides, it would be difficult to distinguish direction beneath the snow and he would most likely be suffocated. It was only the beginning of November and it would take over half a year until the beginning of summer. The valley was completely surrounded by snow, how could they find anything to eat that will last five or six months?

Hua Tiegan returned outside the cave and his expression was extremely serious. He sat down for a long time and took out a piece of horse meat from his bosom, chewing slowly amidst his thoughts. After he finished his horse meat completely, he spoke softly: "By the time of next year's Dragon Boat Festival, we should be able to get out of here."

Di Yun and Shui Sheng were situated about three dozen feet away from him on each side. Although his words were quiet, they could both hear it as if it was roaring like thunder. The two of them gazed upon their surroundings at once and only saw that snow all around. It would be difficult to find even grass or tree bark to eat. Both wondered: "How will I last until next year?"

At this time, the sounds of eagles crying were heard as they soared in the air. The three of them looked up together and saw seven or eight eagles flying in the distance and thought: "Only if I could fly like an eagle would I be able to get out of here."

Although Shui Sheng's horse was fat and well built, but with the three of them eating away every day, it would not even last a full month. Come another seven or eight days, even the head and all its intestines would be eaten away completely.

Hua Tiegan, Di Yun, and Shui Sheng did not say a word to each other. Occasionally, they would look at each other, but when they made eye contact, they would immediately look away. Several times, Hua Tiegan had the intention of killing Di Yun and Shui Sheng, but thought that if he were to kill the

two of them, the feeling of being all alone in the valley would be unbearable. Besides, he thought that the two of them were under his control and was not in a hurry to finish them off.

After some days, Shui Sheng's suspicion and resentment for Di Yun decreased substantially, and she finally went inside the cave to sleep. When December came around, the temperature inside the valley was even colder than before, the north wind blew against them the entire night and they trembled to the bone. As Di Yun had completed the Heavenly Glow, he continued to practice and his internal energy would increase by a percent every day. However, his clothes were thin and in this world of ice and snow, he found it difficult to endure. Sometimes, Shui Sheng would look outside the cave and see him shiver without any intention of setting foot inside the cave. She thought that although this monk was vicious, he still had courtesy.

By now, Di Yun's various injuries had healed completely; even his broken leg was reconnected and he could walk without trouble. Sometimes, he would remember that his leg was fixed by the Blood Sabre Elder, and could not help but feel sad.

Now that the horse meat was finished, finding food became a serious problem. In the past few days, Di Yun searched laboriously around for food which became increasingly scarce and only managed to find bits and pieces. The reserves of food he saved up were rudely taken away by Hua Tiegan. Shui Sheng thought: "When a renowned hero faces a calamity, he stoops even lower than a little vicious monk from the Blood Sabre Clan!"

That night, on the third watch, Shui Sheng was awoken as she heard the sound of dispute. Di Yun scolded: "You cannot touch Hero Di's body!"

Hua Tiegan replied coldly: "In another few days, I will eat you alive! I am eating the dead first to allow you to live for a few more days!"

Di Yun said: "We would rather eat tree barks and grassroots than eat a person!"

Hua Tiegan scolded: "Out of my way! What does it matter to you? If you annoy me further I will kill you immediately."

Shui Sheng rushed out of the cave at once and saw that Hua Tiegan and Di Yun were standing beside her father's corpse. Shui Sheng yelled: "Don't touch my daddy!" and rushed forward. She saw that the snow covering her father's corpse was already brushed aside as Hua Tiegan grabbed Shui Dai firmly by the chest with his left hand. Di Yun shouted: "Drop him now!"

Shui Sheng could only utter: "You... you..."

A flash of cold light was seen as Hua Tiegan drew his short spear from his sleeve, slanting it in front of him in an offensive position. At once, he aimed to attack Di Yun's chest. This stroke was executed remarkably fast. Although Di Yun's internal energy had increased substantially, his external techniques were taught by Qi Zhangfa and were nothing impressive. Now that he was suddenly attacked by an expert like Hua Tiegan, how could he endure? In a moment of hesitation, the short spear had already pierced his chest. Shui Sheng cried out in alarm and did not know what to do.

Hua Tiegan had intended to pierce the spear through him completely from front to back, but unexpectedly, when the tip of the spear met his chest, it was obstructed and would not pierce



through. Nevertheless, the power of the spear was remarkable, and Di Yun fell backwards from the force of the attack. He flipped over his left hand and hit the pole of the spear with his palm. With a loud crack, the web between Hua Tiegan's forefinger and thumb cracked as the spear flew out of his hand and into the distance. This palm was so strong that it caused Hua Tiegan to do a somersault before he tumbled backwards. The short spear was tossed into the pile of snow without a trace.

Hua Tiegan was completely taken aback and thought: "This little monk's martial arts is marvellous, he is not worse than the old monk!" He rolled backwards several times before he got up and ran away.

What Hua Tiegan did not know was that the reason his spear could not pierce through was because it was obstructed by Di Yun's dark silkworm vest. However, his stance was executed with much power and caused Di Yun to suffocate slightly. When Di Yun's air could not circulate properly he fainted on the ground. If not for the fact that he had already completed the Heavenly Glow, that spear would have took his life at once. Hua Tiegan's martial arts, in comparison with Zhou Qi who also pierced Di Yun in the chest that day in Jingzhou; although Di Yun had the protection of the dark silkworm on both occasions, the difference between the power of these two attacks was over five-fold.

The moon illuminated in the night sky. When the two bald eagles saw Di Yun lying on the snow, they began to spiral around in circles. When Shui Sheng saw that Di Yun lied on the snow lifelessly, she thought that he was killed by Hua Tiegan. She was delighted as she thought: "The little monk is finally dead. From now on I don't have to be afraid of anyone violating me." But she thought further: "Hua Tiegan wanted to eat my daddy's corpse and this little monk died as a result of trying to protect him. But this little monk most likely harbours malicious intentions, he wants to deceive me... deceive me... hmph, I will not fall for his tricks. But now that he is dead, if Hua Tiegan comes back for my daddy, what can I do? Even worse, he might violate me... no, he won't... he is my uncle after all, he would not go so far as to... but this person is so obscene... completely shameless... he will do anything. Ai... hopefully, this little monk is not actually dead..."

She held the blood sabre on her hands and slowly walked to Di Yun. She saw that he did not move in the slightest and lied facing upward on the snow, but the muscles in his face twitched slightly, it was clear that he was still alive. Shui Sheng was delighted; she bent down and extended her finger to his nose to check for his breath and felt two surges of blazing hot air blowing on her finger.

Shui Sheng was startled and retracted her hand at once. She thought that even if Di Yun was not dead, he would still have very faint breathing. How would she know that he would exhale such hot air? She did not know that Di Yun's internal energy was profound now; even though he was unconscious, his breathing was still strong. However, as he had only recently completed such a profound internal art, he could not yet remain calm and unflustered; he had not yet reached the stage of harmonizing his energy naturally.

Shui Sheng thought: "This little monk is unconscious, but when he wakes up and sees me standing beside him, that would not be good." She turned her head and saw that Hua Tiegan was watching the two of them from afar.

When Hua Tiegan failed to kill Di Yun and was further attacked by his palm, he became startled and frightened. But now he saw that Di Yun was lying down on the ground motionless and did not know whether he was dead or alive. After some time, he saw that Di Yun still did not get up and began to

move forward step by step. At this point his right arm was slightly numb and in pain, if Di Yun were to suddenly wake up he would run away at once.

Shui Sheng became alarmed and shouted: "Don't come over here!"

Hua Tiegan laughed maliciously and said: "Why can't I come here? A person who is alive tastes better than a person who is dead. We may be fortunate enough to split him into two shares, why not?" As he said this, he moved closer. Shui Sheng had no way of stopping him and began to shake Di Yun heavily and said: "He's coming, he's coming!"

Hua Tiegan saw that Di Yun was still unconscious and was thrilled. At once he leaped over and raised his right palm to strike him. Shui Sheng brandished her blood sabre and executed a stance of "Golden Needle Escapes Calamity" to attack Hua Tiegan. What she executed was a sword stance, but the edge of the blood sabre was exceptionally sharp and there was formidable power in this strike. Hua Tiegan had lost his short spear and was now fighting bare-handed, he was afraid that he would be cut by the sabre and did not dare to underestimate his opponent. At once he executed his martial arts of battling a weapon without a weapon with the intent of taking his opponent's weapon away.

Di Yun semiconsciously heard Shui Sheng's shout of "He's coming, he's coming!" and did not understand what she meant. After hearing some more shouts and disputes, he opened his eyes. The moonlight reflected the blood sabre that was brandishing against Hua Tiegan.

Although Shui Sheng had the advantage of a weapon, firstly she did not know how to use a sabre, and secondly her martial arts were far inferior. It was not long before she began to retreat in her attacks. She did not bother trying to wound her opponent and could only hope that the weapon in her hand would not be taken away. As she fought, she kept yelling "Hey! Wake up! He wants to kill you!"

Di Yun became alert and trembled as he thought: "That was close! She saved my life. If she did not resist Hua Tiegan, I would have died a long time ago. Although I have the protection of the dark silkworm vest, if he aimed for my head, I would have died for sure." At once he jumped up and attacked Hua Tiegan with his palm. Hua Tiegan countered with his own palm. A loud clash was heard as both of them fell on the ground. Di Yun's internal energy was profound while Hua Tiegan's palm techniques were brilliant; the two palms were equally matched.

Hua Tiegan had a high level of martial arts and knew how to shift gears. Once he fell on the floor, he got back up again and attacked with a second palm. Di Yun could not get up in time and could only return a palm while sitting down. Although he was sitting down, his palm strength did not suffer. Another clash was heard as Di Yun was shocked and flipped two somersaults, while Hua Tiegan was rebounded three steps. The flow of blood and energy in his chest was circulating fast and he thought: "This little vicious monk actually has such profound internal energy!" However, when the two of them clashed palms, he knew that his opponent's technique was nothing remarkable. At once he mustered up his courage and attacked with his palm a third time.

Di Yun was still sitting down as he countered again with his palm. However, he did not expect that Hua Tiegan's palm was light and swift and swept past his face. Di Yun's palm only hit thin air while Hua Tiegan's palm hit Di Yun squarely on the chest. Fortunately, Di Yun had the protection of the dark silkworm vest and did not sustain any injuries. However he could not endure the impact of the blow. As soon as he wanted to get up he fell back down. Hua Tiegan saw that his attack succeeded

and immediately followed with another palm. Although he became renowned through his proficient use of the Zhongping Spear and was even nicknamed “Zhongping Undefeated”, he was also proficient at attacking with his palms and legs. At this point he executed a stance of the “Yue Family Palm”. The palm was light and swift; a palm on the left and a palm on the right, in ten strokes, four or five successfully hit Di Yun. When Di Yun tried to counter with his own palm Hua Tiegan would dodge it cleverly. The gap between their martial arts was much too great. Even if Di Yun’s internal energy was greater, he could not find a good way to execute it.

Eventually, Di Yun could only cover his head and face with both hands. He could not defend at all against Hua Tiegan’s attacks. As soon as he tried to get up, he would fall back down. Hua Tiegan wanted to finish him off quickly and increased the ferocity of his attacks. Di Yun spat out blood three times and his movements became slow and sluggish.

At first when Shui Sheng saw the two of them in such an intense battle, she did not dare to interfere. But upon seeing Di Yun on the verge of death, at once she brandished her sabre and attacked Hua Tiegan from behind. Hua Tiegan evaded the attack and flipped his hand over to seize her weapon. Di Yun exerted all his strength and stroke out with his right palm, the remarkable force of the palm wind blew on Hua Tiegan as it approached. Hua Tiegan could not dodge in time and could only counter with his own palm. In terms of a pure internal energy competition, Hua Tiegan was not his match. All of a sudden, he began to see stars and felt numbness on half his body, he felt wobbly and could not balance himself.

Shui Sheng shouted: “Let’s go! Let’s go!” She pulled Di Yun inside the cave. The two of them quickly covered up the entrance with large rocks. Shui Sheng grasped the blood sabre firmly and guarded on the side. The entrance of the cave was narrow and some of the larger rocks could not obstruct it. But for Hua Tiegan to enter the cave, he would have to shift a few pieces of rock first, and as soon as he did so, Shui Sheng would brandish her sabre and cut off his hands.

After a while there was no more activity outside. Shui Sheng said: “Little vicious... little...” She was used to calling him “little vicious monk”, but at this point they had to join hands to oppose a common enemy, if she were to continue to call him “little vicious monk” it would be quite rude. She changed her words and said: “How are your injuries?”

Di Yun said: “I’ll manage...”

All of a sudden, they heard the sound of Hua Tiegan laughing outside the cave. “The two scoundrels are hiding together in a cave doing unmentionable deeds.” Shui Sheng felt a warm sensation on her face as she heard this. In truth, she was actually a bit scared, because she had already identified Di Yun as a “perverted monk” who was extremely dishonourable. To be stuck in the same cave as him was indeed a great risk, she could not help but move a few steps to the left, trying to distance herself from him as far as possible.

She heard Hua Tiegan continue: “If you don’t stop your illicit love affair, this old man will have to roast some meat. Haha! Haha!”

Shui Sheng was alarmed and said: “He wants to eat my daddy! What do we do?”

Di Yun had already suffered so much grief and injustice in the past few years. Upon hearing Hua Tiegan’s venomous slander, how could he repress his anger? At once he pushed the rocks aside and

rushed out like a wild tiger and attacked Hua Tiegan. Hua Tiegan avoided two palms and drew an arc with his left palm while his right palm came from behind his back. Not even in his dreams would Di Yun expect him to attack in such a way, and with a loud crash he was hit firmly on his upper back. Di Yun spat out a mouthful of blood and felt dizzy. He felt as if the person in front of him transformed into Wan Zhenshan, Wan Gui, the magistrate of Jiangling county, the gaolers, Ling Tuisi, and Bao Xiang... the appearance of many vicious people who had insulted and abused him in the past. At once he spread out both arms and hugged Hua Tiegan tightly.

Hua Tiegan punched Di Yun squarely on the nose. At once his nose started bleeding profusely, but it was as if Di Yun could not feel the pain, and the two arms around Hua Tiegan became tighter and tighter. Hua Tiegan found it difficult to breathe and was actually a bit frightened. He also saw that Shui Sheng was approaching with the blood sabre. Hua Tiegan became alarmed and pounded Di Yun's flank with both fists. Di Yun felt the pain and could not use any more strength in his arms. Hua Tiegan struggled and broke himself free from Di Yun's grip. He did not dare to tangle with this lunatic anymore and leapt backwards continuously until he was over a hundred feet away.

Shui Sheng saw as Di Yun's body swayed back and forth, unable to keep his balance. His entire face was covered in blood. She wanted to go forward and support him but she was afraid. She approached cautiously a few steps when Di Yun suddenly shouted: "I am a vicious and perverted monk, don't come near me. I don't want to tarnish the daughter of the great Hero Shui. Go away! Go away!" Shui Sheng listened as he spoke in such a harsh tone and his expression was vicious. She was intimidated and retreated a few steps.

Di Yun gasped for breath as he made his way to Hua Tiegan, barely able to keep his balance. He shouted: "All of you vicious people, Wan Zhenshan, Wan Gui... you can't harm me... can't kill me. Come over here and let's fight... magistrate and prefect... come fight me now! You can only bully the benevolent, if you have any guts then let us fight to the death..."

Hua Tiegan thought: "This person has gone mad, he's a lunatic!" He backed away as far as he could.

Di Yun faced upward at the sky and yelled: "All of you evil people, all the malicious people under heaven, come fight me. Di Yun is not scared of you! You have locked me in prison, pierced my scapula, sliced off my fingers, stolen my martial sister, poisoned my Brother Ding, trampled my leg, wronged me as a perverted monk... I am not scared! Even if you cut me into mincemeat, I am still not scared!"

Shui Sheng listened to his loud cries and felt both afraid and pitiful in her heart. She heard him say how they pierced his scapula, sliced off his fingers, stole his martial sister, and trampled his leg. She was moved and thought: "It turns out that this little vicious monk has actually suffered so much injustice. I was the one who trampled his leg with my horse." She further heard him say that they wronged him as a perverted monk and thought: "Could it be that he isn't... supposing that he is, he has not acted rudely towards me in these days, maybe he turned into a good person?"

Di Yun cried so hard that his voice became hoarse and he collapsed on the snow. Hua Tiegan did not dare to approach him. Shui Sheng did not dare to approach him either.

Two bald eagles continued to spiral around in the air. Di Yun collapsed on the ground and did not move. Suddenly, a bald eagle descended and pecked at his forehead. Di Yun was in a state of subconscious and dizziness. When the eagle pecked at him, he immediately awoke. The bald eagle

saw that he moved and hurriedly fluttered its wings. Di Yun yelled: "Even a creature like you is picking on me!" At once he gathered up his strength and stroke out with his right palm. The bald eagle was only about a meter away from him and was completely shaken up by this attack. At once it stopped fluttering and dropped on the ground.

Di Yun grabbed the bald eagle and burst into laughter. Immediately he bit the bald eagle on the stomach. The bald eagle flapped its wings and tried its hardest to break free. Di Yun only felt a mouthful of eagle blood burst into his mouth as he continued biting the eagle, as if an influx of energy was flowing into his body. He danced around and gesticulated for joy, shouting: "You want to eat me? I will eat you first! I will eat you!"

Hua Tiegan and Shui Sheng saw as he ate the live eagle like a complete lunatic. Their faces changed colors as they were overwhelmed with shock and horror.

Hua Tiegan was really afraid that this lunatic would go crazy again and try to take his life. He thought that if the lunatic were to get a hold of him again he would be in trouble, so he wanted to get as far away as possible. He looked at the east side of the valley and thought that the way this lunatic captured the bald eagle was a good method. At once he lied supine on the ground and pretended to be dead. Indeed, the bald eagle did fall for this trick, but when it came to peck at him, he could not successfully knock down the eagle with his palm strike. His internal energy was much inferior to Di Yun; although his palm technique was remarkable, the eagle was quick-witted and dodged his attack, it was much faster than he was.

After Di Yun drank the eagle blood, the energy and blood in his chest and stomach began to circulate and he passed out again. When he woke up, the sky was already bright and he felt hungry again. He naturally grabbed the dead eagle beside him without thinking twice and took a bite. As he took a bite, he felt an aromatic fragrance, the taste was not bad! He looked at the eagle and was bewildered at what he saw—all the feathers on the eagle were pulled out cleanly and the eagle was actually roasted and warm. He recalled that he drank several mouthfuls of eagle blood before he slept. Who was the one who roasted the eagle for him? If it was not Shui Sheng, could it be the vicious Hua Tiegan?

Last night when he cried and cursed so heavily, a lot of the grief and indignation in his heart was released. Now that he woke up, he felt free from worry. He saw that Shui Dai was once again buried properly in the snow. He looked inside the cave and saw Shui Sheng resting against a rock. Di Yun thought: "She has also been without food for a few days, but she roasted the eagle for me without saving any for herself. Such good conscience is hard to come by. Hmph, she believes herself to be an honorific daughter of a renowned hero and looks down on me. If you look down on me I will look down on you, so what?" After a while he thought: "She helped me roast the eagle; even if she looks down on me, I can't let her starve to death."

At once he lied down on the ground looking dead as a corpse. Within an hour, he managed to strike down four eagles with his palm attacks and gave two to Shui Sheng. Shui Sheng took and prepared the other two eagles as well. Then without saying a word, she gave the two roasted eagles back to him.

There were many bald eagles in this valley that depended on scavenging corpses and carrions for food. It was such a natural instinct that even upon seeing their various comrades fall victim to Di Yun, they nonetheless continued to fall for his trick every single time. Di Yun's internal energy and

the strength of his palm strikes was increasing by the day. Eventually, he did not even need to feign death; if an eagle would land on a branch to rest or fly past him, he would be able to shoot it down with one palm. There were often snow geese coming and going, pecking at various worms and insects buried in the snow, which served as another source of food for Di Yun and Shui Sheng.

December soon approached, but Di Yun had lost his sense of time. Every eight or ten days there would be a large snowstorm and the valley would be extremely cold for the entire day and night. Apart from gathering branches and roasting eagles, Shui Sheng would spend the remaining of her time inside the cave. Di Yun never said a single word to her, nor did he ever step foot inside the cave.

A large snowstorm approached one night. When Di Yun woke up the next morning, he felt a warm sensation around his body. He looked and saw that there was a black object covering his body. He was startled and pushed it aside. He saw it was an article of strange clothing. This clothing was made by threading bird feathers one by one; the black feathers were from the bald eagles while the white feathers were from the wild geese. The coat was long and covered up to his knees, it must have taken several thousand or tens of thousands of feathers to complete.

As Di Yun held on to the feather coat he felt his face flush red. He knew that it was Shui Sheng who made it for him, the effort of threading thousands upon thousands of feathers together was truly painstaking, not to mention that there were no scissors or needles and threads in the snow, how did she complete it? He spread out the feather coat to look at the feathers and saw that a small hole was pierced at the root of each feather and the thread was light yellow. He figured that she must have used her hairpin as a needle and her light yellow garment as a thread. "Heh, women are so strange. Isn't she just causing trouble for herself?"

Then he remembered the incident at the Wan household several years ago. He was attacked and beaten into a pulp by the eight disciples of the Wan clan, even his new garment was torn apart. When his martial sister Qi Fang saw this, she sewed and mended the garment back together for him. The events of that day were still crystal clear in his mind: Qi Fang sat next to him while she mended his garment; her hair brushed against his chin and his face became tickly. He smelled the faint fragrance of her skin which caused ripples in his heart. Di Yun called "Martial sister" and Qi Fang said: "Water Spinach, don't talk, don't let others wrong you as a thief."

As he thought up to this point, his throat became clogged as tears began to drop down his face. His vision became blurry and he thought: "Indeed, they have mistaken me for a thief. Is it because when martial sister mended the garment for me, I said something wrong?" But he had already suffered so many crises and injustices in the past few years, he no longer believed in such nonsense. "Hmph, if others have the intent to wrong me, even if I was born a mute, would they not still find a way? Martial sister is truly sincere to me, but the Wan family is wealthy and prestigious and Wan Gui is much more handsome than I, so who can I blame? Even worse, when I was injured that day and hid in the firewood room, she actually told her husband to capture me for a reward. Hah!"

Suddenly, he was again filled with grief and misery that he could not repress. He began to laugh wildly. He walked in front of the cave and threw the feather coat on the ground. Then he trampled over it several times and shouted: "I am a vicious monk, how am I deserving of wearing young lady's clothing?" With a flying kick he sent the feather coat flying inside the cave, then he turned around and laughed wildly as he strode his way out.

Shui Sheng spent an entire month to complete this feather coat. She thought that this “little vicious monk” protected her father’s body unconditionally without a single word of complaint, and they had only survived to this day because of his ability to strike down birds. When she saw that he was enduring the cold weather outside the cave she could not bear it and sewed a feather coat for him to keep him warm. However, her good intentions were not appreciated; he actually kicked the feather coat inside the cave and she had to suffer his rude humiliation. She was both ashamed and furious. Unable to restrain her emotions, she began ripping apart the feather coat, her tears dripping on the feathers.

She would never have guessed that when Di Yun turned around and laughed, the front of his garment was actually filled with many drops of tears. However, he shed tears because he grieved at his own misfortune, because of his martial sister’s coldness towards him...

When afternoon came, Di Yun killed four birds as usual and placed them in front of the cave. Shui Sheng roasted the birds and gave half to him. The two of them did not exchange a word and did not even dare to make eye contact.

Di Yun and Shui Sheng were some distance apart and each ate at their own roasted bird when suddenly from the northeast direction footsteps could be heard. Both looked up into the distance and saw Hua Tiegan carrying a ghost head sabre on his right hand while his left hand was holding a long sword and laughed heartily. Di Yun and Shui Sheng both got up at once. Shui Sheng went back to the cave and took out her blood sabre. She hesitated for a moment before saying, “Catch!” and threw the sabre toward Di Yun.

Di Yun caught the sabre and wondered: “Why does she trust me so much that she is even willing to part with her sabre? Hmph, she wants me to risk my life to battle Hua Tiegan. Hmph! I, Di Yun, am not your slave.”

At this time, Hua Tiegan increased his pace and when he got closer he laughed and said: “Congratulations! Congratulations!”

Di Yun stared at him and said: “What is there to congratulate?”

Hua Tiegan said: “I congratulate that you and Lady Shui are happy together now. She is willing to give you her sabre. Would she even be willing to give you her body? Haha! Haha!”

Di Yun scolded: “You call yourself a hero of the Central Plains, yet you are a petty fellow who thinks of such despicable and filthy deeds!”

Hua Tiegan laughed: “In terms of being despicable and filthy, how can I compare with the various members of the Blood Sabre Clan?” As he said this he approached closer. He sniffed a few times and said: “Mmm, very fragrant! Very fragrant! I would like to take a bird, is that alright?”

Had Hua Tiegan asked nicely Di Yun would have agreed for sure, but when he saw how mischievous and frivolous he was, he became angry and said: “Your martial arts is much higher than mine, don’t you know how to catch your own birds?”

Hua Tiegan replied: “I am just lazy.”

As the two of them were speaking, Shui Sheng approached behind Di Yun and shouted: “Uncle Liu! Uncle Lu!” She saw Hua Tiegan holding the long sword of Liu Chengfeng and the ghost head sabre of Lu Tianshu. The north wind blew against Hua Tiegan and flipped over his garment, revealing that he had another two layers of clothes underneath; the Taoist vest of Liu Chengfeng and the copper coloured gown of Lu Tianshu.

Hua Tiegan was calm and collected as he asked: “What is it?”

Shui Sheng said: “Did you... did you... did you eat them?” She already figured that Hua Tiegan found their two bodies and ate them.

Hua Tiegan reprimanded: “What does it matter to you?”

Shui Sheng trembled: “Uncle Lu, Uncle Liu... they... they were your sworn brothers...”

If Hua Tiegan actually had the ability to hunt birds, he would not have eaten his sworn brothers’ corpses. He tried every possible means to catch them. At first, he was able to catch one or two eagles. But after a few days, the eagles no longer fell for his trick. He did not have the internal energy of the Heavenly Glow like Di Yun so he was unable to knock the eagles down with his palm. He had no other alternative but to eat the corpses of his two sworn brothers. Now that he was finished with them, he held sword in hand with the intent of killing Di Yun and Shui Sheng. That combined with the corpses of Shui Dai and the Blood Sabre Elder may barely last him until early summer when the snow melts.

When he heard Shui Sheng say such words, his face flushed red. He also began to salivate as he smelled the aroma of the roasted bird meat. At once he raised his ghost head sabre and rushed towards Di Yun, slashing left and right. Di Yun raised his blood sabre to counter. Ting! The two sabres clashed intensely and the ghost head sabre advanced upwards and swiped down. The ghost head sabre was a remarkable sabre but it could not compare to the sharpness of the blood sabre. However, its blade was massive and the blood sabre could not cut it down. That day when Lu Tianshu clashed his sabre with the Blood Sabre Elder, the ghost head sabre was slashed three times by the blood sabre leaving three jags. Today it would happen again, another jag was left on the sabre as the blood sabre cut it.

Although Hua Tiegan was not an expert of the sabre, his martial arts was high. When he brandished his sabre Di Yun found it hard to resist. In only a few stances Di Yun had no choice but to retreat. Hua Tiegan did not pursue; he bent down and picked up the remaining half of the roasted bird on the ground and ate it. He complimented: “Very good! Very good! The taste is amazing, simply amazing!”

Di Yun looked back at Shui Sheng and both of them trembled. The last time they fought, Hua Tiegan was empty-handed, but this time he had a sabre in hand. The first time they fought, even if Di Yun was hit by his punches or kicks he would only cough up blood and sustain injuries, it was not enough to take his life. But this time he had a weapon in hand, if Di Yun were to be careless he would lose his life at once. Furthermore, Hua Tiegan brought an extra weapon for backup, so he really did have an overwhelming advantage.

After Hua Tiegan finished eating the bird, he was still not satisfied. He saw that there was another inside the cave and fetched it. He wiped his mouth and said: “Very good. Your cooking skills are



really first class." He lazily turned around then suddenly jumped and slashed his sabre toward Di Yun. This stance was executed remarkably fast and Di Yun did not guard properly against it and his head was nearly cut in half. He hastily warded off the attack with his sabre. Hua Tiegan was afraid of his profound internal energy; he knew that if he were to clash swords with him, he would be at a disadvantage and his arms would be numb. At once he slanted his sabre and slashed sideways. Within three swipes, Di Yun was already flustered. Then his left arm was scraped by the ghost head sabre.

Shui Sheng shouted: "Don't fight! Don't fight! Uncle Hua, I will give you some of my roasted meat."

Hua Tiegan saw that Di Yun's sabre techniques were extremely mediocre and could not even compare to third class fighters in the martial world. He decided that he would kill him now to save himself the trouble later. At once he intensified his attacks as he said: "Niece Shui, you love him dearly, don't you? Have you forgotten about your cousin surnamed Wang?" Shua! Shua! Shua! He cut Di Yun three times on the right shoulder. Fortunately, he had the protection of the dark silkworm vest else his entire arm would have been cut off.

Shui Sheng shouted: "Uncle Hua, don't fight!"

Di Yun scolded: "What are you shouting for? If I can't fight him, then he can kill me." In extreme anger he raised his sabre and slashed randomly. Suddenly, he passed the blood sabre from his right hand to his left hand, then flipped his hand over to attack.

Hua Tiegan did not expect that this little monk would actually be capable of such a technique. This attack came as an unexpected coincidence; Hua Tiegan turned his head to evade the blow, but with a loud slap, he was hit hard on the neck. This attack was so powerful that it shook and numbed half his body. Di Yun was startled and thought: "This is the 'Slap-in-the-face Stance' that the old beggar taught me!" He realized this technique worked and executed the "Piercing Shoulder Stance" and "Releasing Sword Stance" in succession.

Hua Tiegan exclaimed: "Liancheng Swordplay! Liancheng Swordplay!"

Di Yun was startled by his words. That day when he fought the eight disciples of Wan Zhenshan in Jingzhou, he executed these three stances and Wan Zhenshan also called it "Liancheng Swordplay". At that time he said Wan Zhenshan was speaking nonsense, but Hua Tiegan is a renowned figure in the Central Plains and is experienced and knowledgeable, yet he also said it was Liancheng Swordplay. Could it be that the three stances that the old beggar taught him was really the Liancheng Swordplay?"

He brandished the sabre like a sword and executed the same three stances numerous times. But how could the martial arts of Hua Tiegan be compared to the likes of Wan Zhenshan's disciples? Besides the element of surprise that came with the first stance, the stances were no longer of any use against him. By the time Di Yun executed the "Releasing Sword Stance" for the fourth time in an attempt to swipe away the ghost sabre, Hua Tiegan was fully prepared for the attack, and with a flying kick he hit Di Yun on the wrist. At once Di Yun lost his grip on the blood sabre. Hua Tiegan continued with a "Push the Boat with the Current" and attacked Di Yun with both weapons.

The sabre and sword both stabbed into his chest, but the edge and tip of both weapons were obstructed by the dark silkworm vest and could not pierce through. Shui Sheng grabbed a rock and

camped on the side for an opportunity. When she saw that Di Yun was in danger she threw the rock at the back of Hua Tiegan's head. Last time when Hua Tiegan failed to pierce through Di Yun with his short spear he already felt strange and could not figure out why. He thought that he must have had a bronze or steel medal placed on his bosom that coincidentally blocked the spear head. However, this time both the sabre and sword pierced his chest and it was definitely not a coincidence. He was dumbfounded for a moment and Di Yun took the opportunity to strike back with his palm while Shui Sheng attacked from behind.

Hua Tiegan shouted: "There's a ghost! There's a ghost!" He started to get goose bumps as he thought: "Could it be that the spirits of Eldest Brother Lu and Brother Liu have come back to reprimand me for eating their bodies?" He began sweat coldly and retreated several steps back.

Di Yun and Shui Sheng retreated to the cave at once and shifted several pieces of large rocks to cover up the entrance. The two of them had already stuffed the entrance quite tightly before, now with the addition of more rocks the entrance was completely sealed.

The two of them had just escaped from the brink of death and their hearts were beating at an alarming rate. They heard Hua Tiegan shout: "Come out turtle bastard! You think you can hide in that cave forever? Can you catch birds from inside the cave? Haha! Haha!" Although he laughed heartily, he was actually very scared and did not dare to dig up Shui Dai's corpse and eat it.

Di Yun and Shui Sheng made eye contact and both had the same thought: "He's right, what are we going to eat in here? But if we come out we will be killed at once, what can we do?"

If Hua Tiegan really wanted to pursue them, he could have easily gone in the cave. Di Yun had lost his blood sabre and would have no way of defending. However, as he could not pierce through Di Yun's body he thought there was some otherworldly spirit causing mischief. He was trembling so hard that he did not dare approach.

Di Yun and Shui Sheng guarded the cave entrance for a while. They saw that Hua Tiegan did not attack and felt more relieved. Di Yun inspected the wound on his left arm and saw that it was bleeding. Shui Sheng ripped off a piece of her lapel and bandaged the wound for him. Di Yun had long parted with the ragged and oversized monk garment he used to wear; he covered up his chest so Shui Sheng would not have to see his bare skin. As he pulled his shirt close together a little booklet fell from his bosom. It was the "Blood Sabre Sutra" that he got from Bao Xiang.

He had just had an intense battle with Hua Tiegan. Although the fight did not last long and he did not exert much strength, he was still extremely nervous. After resting for a while, he felt extremely exhausted. He recalled the day when he encountered the Blood Sabre Sutra, how he practiced its cultivation methods by following the diagrams of the male in the booklet, and how it invigorated him. He thought that Hua Tiegan would not let the matter drop; although he would most certainly die if they were to fight, he would at least want to land a few heavy palms on his opponent, but how could he do so if he was so tired? So he flipped to a random page in the booklet and saw a diagram of a man standing upside down, his hands in an extremely awkward position. At once he followed the position of the diagram and stood on his head.

Shui Sheng saw him in such a weird posture and thought that he was going crazy again. She thought that outside was a powerful enemy but inside was a lunatic, what could she do? She could not refrain herself from crying.

Di Yun practiced for about an hour and felt his entire body was warm as if he was next to a fire, he felt an indescribable comfort. He turned to the next page and saw a diagram of a man who stood on his left hand; his body was straight while his legs were hooked against his neck. This position was originally extremely difficult, but after Di Yun completed the Heavenly Glow, he found that he had complete flexibility in his four limbs. At once he followed the position on the diagram, his internal followed the red and green pathways labeled on the diagram and channelled through various acupoints in his body.

This Blood Sabre Sutra consisted of the secrets of both internal and external techniques of the Blood Sabre Clan. The diagram in every page would take an ordinary person a year or so to learn. However, Di Yun had his Ren and Du meridians interlinked and had the matchless internal techniques of the Heavenly Glow as a foundation, even if the martial arts were harder he would still be able to learn it. It did not take him very long to get through each diagram, and he continued to follow the positions page by page. The more he practiced, the more exuberant he felt.

Shui Sheng watched as he practiced martial arts according to the manual. She was frightened when she saw how strange his positions were, and found it both funny and ridiculous. At the same time, she was astonished as she thought: "Could there actually be such a martial art under heaven?" She moved forward two steps and took a look at the Blood Sabre Sutra. When she saw that every page had a diagram of a naked man in various positions, her face flushed red. Her heart pounded as she thought: "If the little vicious monk keeps practising, will he take off his clothes too?"

Fortunately, this never happened.

Di Yun continued practising. He turned another page and saw a diagram of a man holding a curved sabre in an offensive position. Di Yun was shocked and blurted out, "Blood Sabre Art!" At once he picked up a twig and practiced according to the diagrams.

This Blood Sabre Art was truly a strange phenomenon. In every stance the sabre was brandished in an unimaginable way. Di Yun only learned three stances before he understood. It turns out that every stance was a result of various strange positions from both front and back. There were diagrams of the man turning upside-down, horizontally, extending his leg to his neck, or flipping over his hand to grab his ear. At once Di Yun picked four stances and practiced them until he was completely familiar. He thought: "I will continue practicing without rest. If I finish practicing these 20 or 30 stances, in four or five days I will be able to have a rematch with the one surnamed Hua. Alas, it is unfortunate that I did not learn these stances sooner."

However, Hua Tiegan would not even give him half a day's rest. Di Yun was focused on practicing the sabre arts when Hua Tiegan shouted from outside the cave, "Little monk, do you think your father-in-law's heart and liver taste any good? It really tastes great!"

Shui Sheng was startled by his words. She pushed aside the rocks and saw Hua Tiegan digging her father's grave with the ghost head sabre. He had not yet completely uncovered the body but it would only be a matter of time. Shui Sheng shouted: "Uncle Hua, you... do you not care about your sworn brotherhood?" She rushed outside.

Hua Tiegan had intended to lure her outside. The plan was to first knock her out and then deal with Di Yun, lest the two of them join forces in battle. Hua Tiegan's movements were quick as lightning;

in an instant, he had seized her wrist with his left hand. Shui Sheng cried, “Ayo!” and countered with her left hand. Hua Tiegan evaded to the side and with one finger he sealed her acupoint by the waist and she fell unconscious.

Di Yun still holding the twig in hand rushed out. Hua Tiegan laughed: “Little monk must be tired of living, trying to fight me with a little twig. Very well, since you are a vicious monk from the Blood Sabre Clan, I will send you to your death with your clan’s very own weapon.” As he said this he drew the blood sabre from his waist and dropped the ghost sabre on the ground. In an instant, he rushed forward and attacked Di Yun three times. This blood sabre was thin as a sheet of paper but made intense slashing sounds. Hua Tiegan thought inwardly, “This sabre is remarkable!”

Di Yun saw that the blood sabre was remarkably fast and began to tremble. He clenched his teeth and thought, “We will die together then!” and brandished the twig with his right hand and attacked from behind. With a loud clap, the twig hit Hua Tiegan firmly on the back of his neck. This stance was incredibly strange, if he had a sharp weapon instead of a branch, Hua Tiegan would have been beheaded already.

In truth, the martial arts between Hua Tiegan and the Blood Sabre Elder were just about on par. Even the Blood Sabre Elder who had practiced the blood sabre techniques thoroughly would not be able to kill him in a single stance, much less Di Yun. However, Hua Tiegan greatly underestimated his enemy and treated his opponent as someone who had no foundation of external techniques. He intended to defeat his opponent with ease; when he raised his sabre to slash downward, Di Yun counterattacked with the twig that was as fierce as the wind in a rainstorm. He brandished his weapon disorderly and occasionally he would be able to execute a stance of the Blood Sabre Art and would be able to hit him from behind. Hua Tiegan turned around and shouted: “There is a ghost! There is a ghost!” He turned around to look and he was so scared that his arms and legs became so numb and weak that he dropped the blood sabre and ran into the distance.

After Hua Tiegan ate the corpses of his sworn brothers, he felt a sense of guilt and always hallucinated that the spirits of Liu Chengfeng and Lu Tianshu were coming back to haunt him. When the blood sabre could not pierce through Di Yun he thought that it must be otherworldly spirits supporting his enemy. At that time it was obvious that Di Yun was fighting in front of him and Shui Sheng had her acupoint sealed and was unconscious, yet he was still hit from the back of his body and neck several times. How would there be another person besides the three of them? When he turned around to look, no matter what he saw he would not have been scared. But he actually saw nothing at all and was completely spooked out of his mind, how could he dare to stay any longer?

Although Di Yun hit Hua Tiegan twice from behind, the latter ran away without actually sustaining any injuries, which was much beyond anyone’s expectations.

Di Yun picked up the blood sabre and saw Shui Sheng lying on the ground. He asked, “Did he seal your acupoint?”

Shui Sheng replied, “Yes.”

Di Yun said: “I do not know how to unseal your acupoint. I can’t help you.”

Shui Sheng said: “You just have to find the spot on my waist and leg...” She wanted to tell him where her acupoint was sealed so he could release it, but when she mentioned her legs she thought of him

being a “little vicious monk”, who although did not violate him recently, was nonetheless improper in the past.

Di Yun saw the fear in her eyes and thought: “Hua Tiegan is already gone, what are you afraid of?” Then he realized that she was afraid of him, and a surge of anger rushed to his heart. He yelled: “You are afraid I’ll violate you, you think I will... I will... hmph! From now on, I will never look at you again.” He was so angry he started kicking the snow as he walked away. He picked up the Blood Sabre Sutra from inside the cave and walked away without looking at Shui Sheng.

Shui Sheng felt embarrassed and thought: “Could it be that I am actually too suspicious and misunderstood his intentions?”

She lied on the floor for over two hours. A bald eagle descended from the air and began pecking at her face. She screamed in alarm when suddenly, she saw a red flash, the blood sabre flew across the air and sliced the bald eagle in half and dropped beside her.

Although Di Yun resented her suspicions, he was worried that Hua Tiegan would return and harm her. Hence he did not go very far away and kept a watch on her while practicing the blood sabre techniques. When he tossed the blood sabre across the air, it sliced the bald eagle in half and flew another hundred feet or so before landing on the ground. He had completed the blood sabre stance of “Shooting Star in Heaven”.

Shui Sheng shouted: “Di Dage, Di Dage, it is my fault. I am sorry one hundred times.” Di Yun pretended not to hear it and ignored her. Shui Sheng continued: “Di Dage, please forgive me. I lost my daddy and I feel lonely. My thoughts are inconsiderate. Please don’t be mad at me anymore, okay?” Di Yun continued to ignore her, although a lot of his anger had dissipated.

It was not until the second day when Shui Sheng’s acupoint released itself. She knew that Di Yun would not say a word to her, yet he still remained close by her side for the entire night. She felt really grateful in her heart. When she could move again, she immediately roasted the bald eagle and gave half of it to Di Yun. Di Yun waited until she got close before he closed his eyes and repeated his words inwardly, “I will never look at you again.”

Shui Sheng placed the roasted eagle on the ground and began to walk away. Di Yun waited for her to walk some distance before opening his eyes again. All of a sudden, he heard her scream “Ah!” followed by another “Ayo!” and collapsed on the ground. Di Yun immediately got up and rushed beside her.

Shui Sheng smiled sweetly as she got up and said: “I deceived you. You said you would never look at me again, yet aren’t you looking at me right now? You do not have to keep your promise anymore.”

Di Yun glared at her and thought: “All the women in this world are sly and crafty. Besides Brother Ding’s Lady Ling, any women are capable of deception. From now on, I will no longer fall for your tricks.”

Shui Sheng laughed delicately and said: “Di Dage, you rushed forward to save me, thank you!”

Di Yun gave her a sideways glance then turned around and walked away.

## Chapter 8 – Feather Coat

Hua Tiegan was so scared of ghosts that he did not dare to cause any more trouble. He could do no more than eat tree bark and grass roots in such bitter hardship. Sometimes he would throw rocks and would be lucky to hit one or two snow geese. Di Yun practised one or two stances of the Blood Sabre Art every day, both his internal energy and external arts grew with each passing day.

Winter passed and spring came. The temperature gradually grew warmer and the accumulation of snow in the valley did not thicken. Eventually, the snow started to melt to water.

In these days, Di Yun had fully practiced all of the various external fist and feet and sabre arts in the Blood Sabre Sutra. At this point he possessed both orthodox and unorthodox martial arts. Although he was still lacking experience, and he did not yet completely grasp the essence of both the unorthodox and orthodox arts, in terms of martial arts, he had already surpassed Ding Dian. However, he only practiced the profound internal arts of the Heavenly Glow, but in terms of external arts, he had no one to give him pointers; besides the Blood Sabre Art, his fist and feet arts were extremely shallow. However, he was nimble and understood the fundamentals of fist arts, he would not be inferior to any second class fighter.

Whenever Shui Sheng spoke, Di Yun would ignore her in fear of falling for her tricks. He pretended to be mute and did not answer her even once. Apart from being together during meal times, Di Yun distanced himself as far away as he could and practiced his martial arts. After he leaves the valley, there were three desires he had to fulfill: first, he would look for his teacher in Xiangxi; second, he would return to Jingzhou and bury his Brother Ding together with Lady Ling; third, revenge!

He saw as the snow gradually melted into a creek of water constantly flowing out of the valley. The pile of snow blocking the entrance became less and less each day. He did not know how many days it was before the Dragon Boat Festival, he only knew that it would not be long before he could get out of here.

One afternoon, he picked up two roasted eagles from Shui Sheng. As he was about to turn and leave, Shui Sheng called out: "Di Dage, after a few more days, we will be able to go outside?"

Di Yun nodded in agreement.

Shui Sheng continued: "Thanks for taking care of me all these days. If not for you, I would have died by the hands of the evil Hua Tiegan."

Di Yun shook his head and replied, "It's no big deal," then turned around and walked away. Then he heard the sounds of sobbing from behind. He turned around and saw Shui Sheng leaning against a rock; her back was twitching as if she was about to cry. Di Yun was perplexed: "We will be able to leave soon, she should be happy. What is there to cry about? The thoughts of a woman are really strange, I will never understand."

In truth, even Shui Sheng did not know why she cried. She only felt unworthy and broken-hearted, she could not restrain herself from crying.

That night, Di Yun practiced a bit of martial arts before he slept on the large rock just like any other night. This large rock was not distanced too far away from the cave so he could guard against Hua Tiegan from either eating the corpse or violating Shui Sheng. However in these past many days Hua

Tiegan never appeared. Di Yun presumed that all was well and no longer remained vigilant, he went into a deep sleep.

Amidst his dreams, he suddenly heard the sounds of footsteps approaching. At this point his internal energy was incredibly profound and his senses were improved, much different from the past. As the sounds of footsteps got closer, he awoke at once. He listened closely and heard the sounds of numerous people, at least 50 or 60, rushing towards the valley.

Di Yun was startled. "How can anyone get in the valley?" He did not know that the valley was a lot colder than the outside world because it was covered by peaks. In truth, the snow had already completely melted outside, but it would still take another month for the snow inside the valley to melt. Di Yun thought: "These people must be from the Central Plains. Now that the Blood Sabre Elder is dead, any desire for vengeance has been fulfilled. Sigh, Lady Shui's cousin will come to pick her up, that would be great. However, they believe that I am a vicious monk from the Blood Sabre Clan, there is no way I can explain myself. It's best if I don't see them at all. I will let them take Lady Shui first, then I will get out at a later time."

He made his way to the side of the cave and hid behind a rock. The sounds of footsteps approached closer. In an instant there was a brightness before his eyes, the group had passed through the depression. There were about 50 people or so and each of them held a torch on one hand and a weapon on the other. There was one person at the front of the pack who did not hold a torch. Instead, he held a sword and a sabre—it was Hua Tiegan.

Di Yun watched as he approached with the group. He was astonished and soon realized, "These people came from Hubei and Sichuan. Hua Tiegan is their leader, naturally he would join them. I wonder what he is saying?" He watched as the group entered the cave and at once he climbed several dozen feet closer and hid in a pile of snow. He was still some distance away from the group, but his internal energy had advanced by leaps and bounds and he could clearly hear what they were saying.

He heard a coarse voice say: "So it turns out that it was Brother Hua who killed the blood sabre monk. That is truly venerable. Brother Hua has done us all a great service. From now on he will naturally be the leader of the Central Plains, we will be ready to risk our lives for you upon your command!"

Another said: "Alas, Hero Lu, Taoist Liu, and Hero Shui has perished in such a violent way. It is truly depressing."

Another said: "The old vicious monk is dead, but the little vicious monk has not been executed. We will search at once. We must cut the weeds and eliminate the roots to prevent future misfortunes. Hero Hua, what do you say?"

Hua Tiegan answered: "Correct, Brother Zhang speaks true words. This little vicious monk has demonic martial arts and is definitely not inferior to the older monk. He must have hid himself somewhere when he saw that we were entering the valley. My brothers, do not be afraid of trouble. We must kill this little vicious monk at any cost so that he doesn't talk rubbish and spread rumors tarnish the reputations of the three Heroes Lu, Liu, and Shui, and Heroine Shui."

## Chapter 8 – Feather Coat

Di Yun was alarmed. “The one surnamed Hua speaks rubbish, he is incredibly vicious. Fortunately I did not reveal myself, else if they all attack me at once, how can I defend?”

All of a sudden, a feminine voice was heard saying: “He... he is not a little vicious monk. He is an honourable and upright gentleman. Hua Tiegan is the villain!” It was Shui Sheng.

As Di Yun heard these words, he felt comfort in his heart. It was the first time he heard her call him an “honourable and upright gentleman”. In these days, even though Shui Sheng was no longer suspicious of him, but for her to call him a gentleman in front of all these people was beyond all expectations. Then tears began to form in his eyes as he thought inwardly, “She called me a gentleman... she called me a gentleman!”

When Shui Sheng said these words, people in the group looked at each other in perplexity. Nobody dared to speak out. Di Yun looked afar and the illumination of the torch revealed expressions of contempt. Some were sneering as if they were taking joy in such a calamity.

After a long while, an old man spoke out: “Niece Shui, I have been friends with your father for many years. I cannot help but reprimand you... this little vicious monk was responsible for your father’s death.”

Shui Sheng said, “No... no...”

“Your father was not killed by the little monk? Then who killed him?”

“He... he...” she was at a loss for words.

“Hero Hua said that during an intense battle that day, your father was completely exhausted; the little monk killed your father by cracking his head with a twig. Am I right?”

“Right, but... but...”

“But what?”

“It was my daddy himself who... who asked to be killed!”

As she said this, many people from the group began to laugh. The laughter was so loud that it even caused the snow on top of the branches to rustle and fall. Amongst the laughs some voices were heard saying, “He asked for his own death, haha! Haha! Your lies are very comical.”

“So it turns out that Hero Shui was tired of living; stuck his head out and asked his future son-in-law to crack it open!”

“Who is his ‘future’ son-in-law? After Hero Shui passed away, that little monk already had an affair with the lady! Haha!”

“There is actually such a shameless woman in the world who would rather have a wild man than her own father. However, to tell her tramp to kill her own father is pretty horrifying.”



"I have only heard of the phrase 'consensual adultery causes the death of the husband', but today it is much different; there is actually a case of 'consensual adultery causes the death of the father'!"

The group had first heard the words of Hua Tiegang and had the impression that Shui Sheng and Di Yun had a secret affair. When she defended her 'lover', they gave her more and more harsh words. However, in terms of words in the realm, what is really too filthy to be said?

Shui Sheng's face flushed red and she yelled: "What... what are you guys talking about? Have you no shame?"

The group continued to laugh. One said: "So it turns out that we're the ones who have no shame, that is really funny!"

"Alright, alright. Lady Shui, it is we who are shameless. But what about you and the little monk making love inside the cave without a care to avenge your own father, how is that for being shameless?"

Another straightforward fellow reprimanded: "Damn it! Your daddy I have travelled from Hubei all the way down here without rest, only to save a whore like you? You are a shameless little bitch. Your daddy I should chop your head off!"

Another urged: "That's not good. Brother Zhao, don't act rashly!"

An old voice said: "Everybody please restrain yourselves. Lady Shui is still young and inexperienced. Hero Shui has unfortunately passed away, now she is lonely with no one to care for her. You do not need to feel sad for her. From now on she will be taken care of and instructed by Hero Hua. He will lead her to a path of righteousness. Everybody please do not speak out so harshly anymore, the events that took place in this valley must not spread into the realm. Hero Shui was a renowned and honourable fellow during his life, else why would we all spare no effort to save her daughter? Let us show Hero Shui some respect and not mention this incident anymore. Let us capture the little monk and cut open his heart and liver and offer it as a sacrifice to Hero Shui."

The one who spoke was a very well-respected man with great dignity. The majority agreed with his words and said, "Right, right. Old Hero Zhang speaks true words. We will find this little monk and dismember his body into ten thousand pieces!"

Amidst the noisy clamours and hoots of the group, Shui Sheng began to cry.

Suddenly, a voice was heard from the distance, calling out, "Biaomei! Biaomei, where are you?"

Shui Sheng heard this voice and knew that it was her cousin Wang Xiaofeng. However, she had suffered injustice and was humiliated greatly, if her cousin were to hear of this, how would he react? She could not help but cry and run back inside the cave.

Someone said: "If the infatuated Wang Xiaofeng realizes the truth, he will go crazy!"

The old man surnamed Zhang replied: "Everybody, please do not panic and listen to me. The young man of the Wang family loves Lady Shui deeply. The snow had not even melted yet and he went into the valley two days before we did. However, the road was difficult and he must have been stuck in

some remote place, such is more haste resulting in less speed. In fact, he even fell behind our group. This person is really unfortunate. Everybody should do a good deed and not speak to him about the scandal between Lady Shui and the little monk.”

An honourable person from the group added, “That is correct! Lady Shui took a misstep in life, she deserves a second chance to start anew. Besides, she had no other choice. In an ordinary situation, how would the daughter of a renowned hero affiliate herself with the monk of an evil sect?”

Another said: “Wang Xiaofeng is such a good fellow, but now he is forced to wear a green hat! It is really unfortunate for him! Haha!”

“One is willing to fight while the other is willing to suffer. Brother Qian, you have left your lonely wife at home for quite some time now. It might be the case that the hat on your head is turning a lush green color?”

“Damn it! Only your wife is lonely!”

“That is right, my wife is lonely. But your wife has a partner now in a romantic relationship, she is not lonely in the least bit...” He did not even finish speaking when he was hit hard on the shoulder by a fist. The group burst into laughter.

Then the sound of Wang Xiaofeng was heard shouting, “Biaomei! Biaomei!” and became more and more distant. He was separated from the rest of the group and did not know where they were.

Shui Sheng rushed out of the cave and shouted: “Biaoge! Biaoge! I am over here! I am over here!”

Wang Xiaofeng shouted again, “Biaomei! Where are you?”

Shui Sheng yelled: “I am over here!”

A shadow was seen approaching from the northeast corner. This person ran while calling out, “Biaomei!” and suddenly he slipped and fell on the wet ground. Shui Sheng let out an “ah” and was deeply concerned. She rushed forward to welcome him. It turns out that when Wang Xiaofeng heard Shui Sheng’s voice, he was so delighted that he paid no attention to the hole in the ground and fell in the depression. He got up as fast as he could and ran forward again. Shui Sheng also ran forward to meet him.

The two ran up to each other and laughed joyously. Then they embraced each other.

When Di Yun saw the affectionate and joyous circumstances of their union, he felt a slightly sour in his heart and did not know why. He still could not forget his martial sister Qi Fang, but after all he spent over half a year together with Shui Sheng; even though it could not be said that he felt an intimate relationship with her, for them to part ways after being together for so long, he could not help but feel reluctant to let go. He thought: “It is best that she leaves with her cousin. Hopefully she will be free of disasters and calamities, marry her cousin, and live the rest of her life happily ever after.”

All of a sudden, he heard Wang Xiaofeng let go and cry, he thought it must be that he figured out the news of Shui Dai's death. After a while, he saw Wang Xiaofeng holding Shui Sheng's hand walking towards him.

Wang Xiaofeng sobbed: "Uncle has run into misfortune. I... I was brought up by him since I was small. He treated me like his very own son."

Shui Sheng listened to her speak of his father in such a way and could not help but cry as well.

Wang Xiaofeng said: "Biamoei, from now on I will never leave you again. Don't be sad, I will take care of you for the rest of your life."

Shui Sheng had always adored and admired her cousin greatly since she was young, now upon hearing him say these words, her face blushed red and felt a sense of sweetness in her heart.

The two of them gradually walked closer to the cave. Then Shui Sheng stopped abruptly and said, "Biaoge, we should leave at once. I don't want to see anyone else."

Wang Xiaofeng was curious and asked, "Why? So many people have risked hardships and perils to come and save you. They have waited outside the valley for over half a year and could be said to be honourable and loyal. Should we not go and express our gratitude?"

Shui Sheng lowered her head and said: "I have already thanked them."

Wang Xiaofeng said: "The group travelled here all the way from Hubei for you. We should come and go together, is that not right? Besides, Uncle's remains have to be taken back home. Even if you wish to bury him here, you should still seek the permission of various elders. And what about Uncle Liu, Uncle Hua, and Uncle Lu?"

Shui Sheng said: "We should leave first. I will explain to you later. Uncle Hua is an evil person, don't listen to his nonsense!"

Wang Xiaofeng had never disobeyed her in the past and saw her grace and charm despite the darkness of the situation. When he heard her sweet and tender voice he was completely fascinated and agreed to her commands to leave first.

All of a sudden someone from near the cave shouted: "Nephew Wang, come over here!" It was the voice of Hua Tiegan.

Wang Xiaofeng replied, "Yes, Uncle Hua!"

Shui Sheng stomped her foot and interrupted urgently, "Will you not listen to what I say?"

Wang Xiaofeng thought: "Uncle Hua is the sworn brother of my teacher. How can I refuse the commands of an honourable elder? There are so many friends who have come to rescue Biamoei without fear of being laboured or vexed. If we just leave after the task is done without saying anything to the others, no matter what such an action could not be justified. My reputation will be tarnished, how can I ever step foot in the realm again? Biamoei is just throwing a little girl's temper

tantrum. I will just apologize and make it up to her later.” At once he let go of her hand and walked towards the cave.

Shui Sheng knew that Hua Tiegan was going to speak poorly of her, but she thought: “I am innocent with a clear conscience, no matter what he says, what can he do to implicate me?” At once she followed Wang Xiaofeng, her face colorless.

The two walked in front of the cave. Hua Tiegan said: “Nephew Wang, I’m glad you’re here. I have killed the vicious blood sabre monk, but there is still a little monk hiding somewhere, we have to capture and kill him at any cost. This little monk is responsible for killing your teacher.”

Wang Xiaofeng shouted in alarm. At once he unsheathed his sword and turned his head to look at Shui Sheng. Under the light of the fire he saw that her face was wan and sallow with tears coming out from her eyes. Wang Xiaofeng felt tenderness and saw her slowly shake her head and asked, “What is it?”

Shui Sheng replied: “Daddy was not... not killed by that person.”

When the rest of the group heard her utter these words, they were extremely angry and all thought: “We thought you would become a good person from now on. For the sake of Hero Shui we did not expose your scandal with the little perverted monk. But now you are siding with the little monk, this matter certainly cannot be forgiven. You don’t even dare to call him a ‘little monk’, you only call him ‘that person’, truly shameless and despicable!”

Wang Xiaofeng saw that the various people in the group scowled and revealed expressions of hate and he felt really strange. He thought the reason that his cousin did not want to meet with the rest of the group must have something to do with their hate, there must be an ulterior motive. He asked: “Biaomei, we should listen to Uncle Hua’s orders and capture the little monk. We will cut him into ten thousand pieces and honour him as a sacrifice to my uncle. Any other matter can be discussed at a later time.”

Shui Sheng said: “He... he is not a little monk.”

Wang Xiaofeng was startled. He saw that the people in the group appeared to despise her greatly and his heart shivered with cold. He had the distinct feeling that something wasn’t right. However, he was unwilling to pursue the matter further. He put his sword back in its sheath and declared: “To the various elders here today, I thank you for your efforts. This matter has now been put to rest. I surnamed Wang would like to once again express my gratitude for your good kindness and virtue.” As he said this he clasped his hands together in greeting.

The group replied: “Correct, the most important task now is to capture the little monk. We can’t let him escape the valley!” At once everyone rushed outside the cave entrance.

Someone accidentally left their torch behind in the cave. The fire fluttered against the wind in the valley. It illuminated the faces of the Twin Knights of Bell Sword, the two looked at each other intensely. They had thousands of words they wanted to say but did not know where to begin.

Di Yun thought: “The two of them must have many words they want to say to each other. I should take my leave now.”

He was about to leave when he heard the sounds of footsteps, two people were fast approaching. One said: "I will search over here, you will search over there! We will circle the area and meet up again."

The other person said, "Good idea. This place is filled with uncoordinated footprints. It could be the case that the little perverted monk is hiding nearby."

The first speaker lowered his voice and grinned: "Hey, Old Song, this Lady Shui is as pretty as a flower. That little perverted monk must have been blessed with good fortune over this half year, hehe."

Another person laughed out loud and said: "Right, ah, it is not surprising that the one surnamed Wang is willing to wear a green headband." The two of them laughed in conversation and then moved separate ways to search for Di Yun.

Di Yun listened closely from the side and felt really sorry for Wang Xiaofeng and Shui Sheng. He thought: "Hua Tiegan is really evil to an extreme. He fabricated such a shameless rumour and tarnished the reputation of Lady Shui. What good does that do for him?" He did not know that Hua Tiegan was afraid that Shui Sheng would tell everyone of his evil deeds, so he made the first move and ruined her reputation, thereafter even if she were to reveal the truth, nobody would believe her words.

Di Yun raised his head to look inside the cave, he saw Shui Sheng retreat two steps. Her face was deathly pale and she shivered and said: "Biaoge, you must not believe these rumours."

Wang Xiaofeng did not answer, his face twitched slightly. Obviously, what the two people said earlier felt like a poisonous snake biting away at his heart. In this past half-year, outside the valley, every day and every night he had one thought in mind: "Biaomei has fallen into the hands of two perverted monks, how can she protect her chastity? But as long as she is alive and well, I will thank the heaven and earth." However, after all a person's desires can never be satisfied. Now that she is alive and well, he also wished that she would have preserved her integrity. When he heard the two folks say such things, he thought: "I Wang Xiaofeng can be considered a gentleman. If the people in the realm hear of these things, how can I prevent their ridicule?" But when he saw Shui Sheng's pitiful expression, his heart softened and he sighed deeply. He shook his head and said: "Biaomei, let's go now."

Shui Sheng asked: "Do you believe their words or not?"

Wang Xiaofeng replied: "What people want to say is their business, how much can I care?"

Shui Sheng bit her lips and declared: "So, does that mean you actually believe it?"

Wang Xiaofeng lowered his head dimly. After a while, he answered: "Alright, I don't believe it then."

Shui Sheng said: "In your heart you have already believed their side of the story." She paused for a moment and continued, "You should never see me again. Just pretend that I died inside the valley."

Wang Xiaofeng said: "It does not have to be like this."

## Chapter 8 – Feather Coat

Shui Sheng grieved deeply in her heart, her tears rushed down her eyes. She did not care even if everyone else in the world slandered or mistreated her, but now even her very own cousin treats her as a cheap whore. She wanted to leave the valley and run away from all these people. She wanted to go to a place where no one knew who she was and never see any of these people again. She thought: "It turns out that in this world, the only one who believes me is that person..."

She rushed outward as far away as she could, but when she neared the exit she could not help but look back at the cave. That was the place where she felt the safest over this half-year. Every night she would sleep in that cave peacefully. She was a neat and tidy person and her fingers were clever, she weaved various mattresses with tree barks and bird feathers and sat on it as a cushion. At this point she had to leave, she had to part with the various items that had stayed with her for all this time, and could not help but feel reluctant. When she saw the feather coat that she weaved for Di Yun, she recalled the events of that day when Di Yun threw it at her. Thereafter she used it as a blanket to resist the cold. At this point she was moved and thought: "Everyone here thinks he is a perverted monk and wants to do him harm. If they find him, how can he handle all these people by himself?" At once she came to a halt and fixed her gaze at the feather coat. She was hesitant and wasn't sure what to do. "If they actually want to kill him, should I help him or not?"

Wang Xiaofeng saw the feather coat placed on top of her mattress. This coat was large and wide, it was evidently made for a man. He could not help but become suspicious and asked: "What... what is this?"

Shui Sheng replied, "I made it."

Wang Xiaofeng repeated, "You made it?"

Shui Sheng wanted to answer "It is not mine," but knew it was inappropriate and did not answer.

Wang Xiaofeng questioned: "It is a man's clothing?" His voice became more harsh and rough. Shui Sheng only nodded in reply.

Wang Xiaofeng asked: "You weaved this for him?" Shui Sheng nodded again.

Wang Xiaofeng picked up the feather coat and looked at it attentively. After a moment, he spoke coldly, "This is very well made."

Shui Sheng corrected: "Biaoge, don't misunderstand. We did not..." But she saw that his eyes were filled with hatred and indignance, she did not dare to speak further.

Wang Xiaofeng pulled out the mattress and asked: "His clothes were placed on your mattress..."

Shui Sheng's heart felt ice cold. She felt that her normally gentle and understanding cousin now became a vulgar and detestable character. She did not want to explain herself further and thought: "If you want to be suspicious, if you want to misunderstand, then that is up to you."

Di Yun watched from the outside the cave. He saw that she was misunderstood and his face was filled with extreme desolation. He thought: "I am a lowly peasant, even if I have been wronged in the past it's nothing worth mentioning. But she is a respected and honourable lady, how can she

suffer such injustice?" When he thought up to this point, he felt morally inclined to help out. He saw that outside the cave were several dozen experts searching around, everybody wanted to kill him. However, he could not overcome his dissonance and at once he stepped leapt in front of the cave and said: "Young Hero Wang, you have misunderstood her completely."

When Wang Xiaofeng and Shui Sheng saw him abruptly appear in front of the cave, they were both startled. At this point Di Yun had grown his hair back and no longer had the appearance of a little monk. Wang Xiaofeng had to look closely to recognize him. At once he drew his sword, pushed Shui Sheng aside and aimed it at his chest. His eyes were filled with fiery hatred and his long sword relentlessly pushed forward. He only wished to cut this person into ten thousand pieces.

Di Yun said: "I am not here to fight you, I only wish to speak. Lady Shui is clear as ice and clean as jade. If you wish to take her as your wife that would be your good fortune. Do not let your imagination run wild, don't listen to the fabrications of these villains."

Shui Sheng would never have guessed that Di Yun would suddenly step forward so bravely. And the only reason why he did so was to prove her innocence. She was both grateful and worried, and hurriedly said: "You... you should leave. There are many people here who want to kill you, it's much too dangerous."

Di Yun replied: "I know, but I have to explain to Hero Wang at any cost. I cannot let you suffer injustice. Hero Wang, Lady Shui is really a good lady, you... you must not wrong her." Di Yun was clumsy with words; even in normal times he would find it difficult to say something clearly, much less something so subtle and disturbing, he stammered seven or eight times in succession and only made Wang Xiaofeng even more suspicious.

Shui Sheng urged: "You... you must leave now! Thank you for your kindness. I can only repay you in my next life, go now! There are so many people here... they want to kill you..."

Wang Xiaofeng heard Shui Sheng's words and saw that her face was filled with worry and concern. He became extremely jealous and yelled: "I will kill you!" He brandished his sword to pierce Di Yun's chest.

Although this stance was executed remarkably, how could it be compared with Di Yun at this point? He had simultaneously completed the ultimate arts of the Heavenly Glow and the Blood Sabre Clan, when he saw Wang Xiaofeng approach, he evaded the attack with ease. He said: "I will not fight with you. I am asking you to marry Lady Shui, you should not be suspicious. She... she is a good lady."

As he spoke, Wang Xiaofeng had already stroke out five times with his sword. Di Yun dodged all of these attacks without the slightest difficulty. He was perplexed and thought: "This person's martial arts used to be formidable, but after not seeing him for over half a year, how come his swordplay is so pathetic?"

Wang Xiaofeng urgently pressed on with his attack. However, every stance was dodged by his opponent with incredible ease. He became even more enraged and violent and executed his stances even faster.

Di Yun said: "Hero Wang, if you promise not to suspect Lady Shui anymore I will take my leave. All of your friends want to kill me, I can't stay here for very long." Wang Xiaofeng increased the pace of

his attacks; Di Yun had remarkable internal energy but his lightness martial arts was average. Although internal energy is the foundation and lightness martial arts is inessential, he further did not receive any pointers from anyone, so he found it increasingly difficult to handle the speed of his opponent's attacks. At once he extended his fingers and with a gentle crack he flicked the sword away with his finger.

Wang Xiaofeng felt an excruciating pain on the web of his finger and his sword fell on the ground. He urgently bent over to pick it up. Di Yun extended his palm to Wang Xiaofeng's shoulder and pushed slightly. Although there was not much energy behind this push, surprisingly, his opponent could not even withstand it and was sent flying backwards with a somersault before falling on the ground. With a loud crash, he bumped against the cave wall. Shui Sheng saw his pitiful state and immediately went over to assist.

Di Yun was shocked at what happened. He did not want to push Wang Xiaofeng, he only wanted to prevent him from picking up the sword and continue the battle. He did not expect that his opponent would fall so greatly, it was definitely beyond his expectations. He walked forward two steps and wanted to help him up and said: "Sorry, I really... I really did not mean to do that."

Shui Sheng helped Wang Xiaofeng up by the right arm and said: "Biaoge, are you alright?" Wang Xiaofeng felt jealousy and resentment in his heart that he could not restrain. He believed that Shui Sheng was partial towards Di Yun and that after the two of them joined hands to defeat him, she came forward to ridicule him. At once he moved his left palm horizontally and slapped Shui Sheng hard on the face, yelling, "Go away!" Shui Sheng was completely startled that her cousin would actually hit her like this. It had never happened before. She extended her hands to feel her face and was expressionless.

Wang Xiaofeng followed through with another smack on her left cheek. Under extreme urgency, Shui Sheng pounced herself against Di Yun's shoulders, knowing that at this point he was the only one who had the power to protect her.

Di Yun extended his left arm to embrace her, then he turned to face Wang Xiaofeng and said: "Why... why did you hit her?"

Then he heard the sounds of several people approaching who said: "There is some ruckus in the cave, quickly go and take a look! Could it be that the little perverted monk is hiding inside?"

Shui Sheng backed away two steps and said to Di Yun: "You should go... I... I thank you for your good kindness."

Di Yun glanced at Wang Xiaofeng then glanced back at Shui Sheng and said: "I will leave now!" and turned around to leave.

Wang Xiaofeng shouted: "The little perverted monk is here! The little perverted monk is here! Seal the exit, don't let him escape!"

Shui Sheng urged: "Biaoge, are you not victimizing him?"

Wang Xiaofeng continued shouting: "Seal the exit! Seal the exit!"



Seven or eight people outside the cave heard Wang Xiaofeng's shouts and at once headed towards the entrance. Di Yun increased his pace when someone shouted: "Where do you think you're going?" At once this person brandished his sabre to strike his head. Di Yun extended his hand and pushed against his opponent's chest. The person fell at once. He collided with three or four people and they all fell in succession. Amidst the chaos of shouts reverberating around the valley, Di Yun quickened his pace to leave.

When the rest of the group heard the ruckus, they came from all directions, but Di Yun had ran away a long time ago. At least ten people pursued him in great haste. Di Yun was frightened and hid himself behind some bushes. He knew that in the darkness of the night, it would be impossible for anyone to discover him. The group thought that he had escaped from the valley and pursued vigorously.

After a while, Di Yun saw that Wang Xiaofeng and Shui Sheng left as well. Wang Xiaofeng was in front while Shui Sheng followed behind, the distanced themselves over a dozen feet. Their figures were soon obstructed by the hillside as they moved farther and farther away.

Just a moment ago the cave was filled with chaos and disturbances, but now it was completely quiet and at peace.

The various heroes of the Central Plains had left. Hua Tiegan had left. Shui Sheng had left. All that remained was Di Yun. Even the bald eagles that spiralled across the skies were nowhere to be seen.

It was truly lonely and isolated. The only thing left was the melting snow gently flowing out of the valley...

## Chapter 9 – Butterfly Lovers



*Di Yun wondered: "There is actually such a treasure bowl in this world? The owner must be scheming."  
He asked: "What is the surname of the owner? You said he is not a local?"*

*The senior replied: "Look over there, isn't the owner coming out right now?"*

Di Yun stayed in the valley for another half-month. He thoroughly practiced the sabre techniques and internal energy cultivation methods inside the Blood Sabre Sutra. When he had fully memorized it by heart, he burnt the scripture and placed the ashes on the Blood Sabre Elder's tomb.

During this time, he continued to sleep on a large rock outside the cave. Although Shui Sheng left, he still did not dare to sleep inside the cave, much less use her mattress or cushion.

Di Yun thought: "I should leave now! I do not need to take the feather coat with me. After I complete my affairs I will return. The people in the outside are sure intelligent, I don't understand what they are thinking. No one will ever come here, it is best if I live here."

Thereupon he left the valley and travelled east. The first thing he wanted to do was return to the cottage in Maxi, Xiangxi to find his teacher. Since he was young he was brought up by his teacher, he considered his teacher as his only close relative in the world.

To get to Xiangxi, he would first have to pass through Sichuan. He thought that if he were to encounter any heroes from the Central Plains a battle would be unavoidable. Although he had never wronged them in any way, it all began when he shaved his head and wore Bao Xiang's monk outfit. Although at this point his martial arts were superb, he lacked confidence and presumed that if he were to meet one or two experts from the Central Plains, he would certainly perish. Hence he bought and wore an ordinary outfit of a village person while he burnt the monk outfit. He further smeared his face with coal to disguise himself. The various commoners throughout Xiangxi and Sichuan liked to wear a white headband, supposedly a result of mourning for Zhuge Liang<sup>1</sup>. Di Yun too found a piece of filthy white cloth and wrapped it around his head. He continued to travel east. Once in a while he would encounter a few fellows from the realm, but nobody could recognize him.

He was most afraid of encountering Shui Sheng, Wang Xiaofeng, or Hua Tiegan. Fortunately, that never happened.

He travelled quickly. It took him about a month or so to reach his teacher's cottage in Maxi. By now the weather had turned warm, the grain and sprouts in the fields grew over four inches tall. The closer he got to his hometown, the more nervous he felt. Slowly, his face turned warm and his heart rate accelerated.

He travelled a path that he had grown accustomed to during his youth. When he reached the entrance of his hometown, he could not help but feel shocked, as if he could not believe his own eyes. It turns out that beside the three cottages next to the willow trees, the streamlet had turned into a large house with white walls and a black roof. This house was at the very least three times larger than the old cottage. From a glance, one could tell that it was built hastily, but it nevertheless imposed a magnificent aura.

He was both startled and delighted. He looked closer at the scenery and confirmed that it was indeed his teacher's residence. He thought: "Teacher must have become rich and returned home. That is great!" Full of delight, he shouted, "Teacher!" But he only called out once before he stopped,

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<sup>1</sup> Zhuge Liang (181-234) was a renowned Shu strategist during the Three Kingdoms period. He is very well-respected even to this day.

thinking, “I wonder if there is anyone else in there? With the way I am dressed I may make my teacher lose face. But I will go in first to have a look.”

After suffering so much hardship throughout the years, he had learned to take extra caution. He was lost in thought when suddenly someone came out of the house and glared at him. His face was full of resentment and asked: “What do you want?”

Di Yun saw that this man wore his hat at an angle and his body was filled with dirt. It did not look like this person matched the owner of the house at all. Upon further inspection, Di Yun thought that this man must be a mason boss and asked: “May I ask if Master Qi is at home?”

The man snorted and replied, “What seventh master<sup>2</sup> or eighth master, they are not here.”

Di Yun was startled and asked: “Is the owner of this house not surnamed Qi?”

The man countered: “What are you talking about? If you are trying to beg for food, don’t pretend to be a relative. There is nothing, there is nothing here! Little beggar, get lost!”

Di Yun was deeply concerned about his teacher. After travelling for such a long time, how could he leave solely based on this man’s words? He asked: “I am not here for food. I would like to ask you, in the past there used to be a person surnamed Qi who lived here, do you know if this elder still lives nearby?”

The man laughed coldly. “Look at you, you little beggar. So talkative are you? The owner is not surnamed Qi, nor is he surnamed eight, or nine, or ten. You should take your leave now.”

As he said up to this point, another person came out from the house. This person wore a skullcap and his clothes were fresh and bright; he had the appearance of a rich housekeeper. This person asked: “Old Ping, what are you shouting for? Who are you arguing with?”

The man replied: “Look at this little beggar and tell me if he’s wordy or not? If he wants to beg for food that’s fine, why does he have to ask for the owner’s surname?”

When the housekeeper heard this, his face changed colours and he measured up Di Yun. After a while, he said: “Little friend, why do you seek the surname of the owner?”

If this was five or six years ago, Di Yun would have gone straight to the heart of the matter, however, he was now experienced and understood the treachery of humankind. When he saw the expression of the housekeeper full of suspicion, he thought: “I will not tell him. It won’t hurt to inquire at a later date. It could be that there has been some misunderstanding.” He asked: “I only wanted to ask for the surname of the owner so that I can utter his name loudly and request him to spare me some rice. Are you the owner?” He intentionally pretended to be a fool to lower the housekeeper’s suspicions.

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<sup>2</sup> A pun on words; the word “seven” in Chinese is also pronounced “qi”, so that person thought he was asking for seventh teacher.

The housekeeper laughed heartily. Although he felt this person was foolish, he was delighted that someone would think of him as the owner. He smiled and said, "I am not the owner. Hey, young fellow, why would you think of me as the owner?"

Di Yun answered: "You... you impose the appearance of an awe-inspiring authority, the looks of a wealthy gentleman."

The housekeeper was even more delighted and smiled. "Silly fellow, if I, Old Gao, really become rich one day, I definitely won't forget you. Hey, little fellow, I can tell that you are young and vigorous. Why would you beg for food instead of finding a proper job?"

Di Yun replied: "No one will hire me. Rich master, would you be kind enough to offer a job to me?"

The housekeeper shook the one surnamed Ping on the shoulder and smiled. "Did you hear that? He called me a rich master. If we don't offer him a job we would be much too rude. Old Ping, tell him to carry dirt and give him an according salary."

The one surnamed Ping said: "Right, I will act according to your orders."

Di Yun listened to the two of their dialects and concluded that the foreman surnamed Ping was a local of Xiangxi, but the housekeeper surnamed Gao was from the north. At once he collected his thoughts and respectfully said: "Rich master, rich master, I thank both of you."

The foreman laughed and teased: "Damn it! You speak nonsense!"

The housekeeper was laughing so hard that he almost slipped and remarked: "I am a rich master, you are also a rich master, then... then haven't we become your sugar daddy?"

The foreman pulled Di Yun by the ear and smiled: "Come inside! Have a good meal first, you will work during the night."

Di Yun did not resist but wondered: "Why do I have to work at night?"

When he went inside the large house and passed through the main hall, he could not help but be startled. What he saw was extremely perplexing and out of place. In the center of the house an extremely large hole was dug; the circumference was so big that it nearly stretched across the four walls. There was only a narrow passage left to pass through. The pit was filled with iron shovels and spades and other digging equipment. It was obvious that they were still digging. When he saw the grandiose of the house from outside, how could he ever have guessed that there would be such a large pit inside?

The foreman said: "You cannot tell anyone outside what goes on in here, alright?"

Di Yun nodded. "Of course! This place must be blessed with good fortune. The owner wants to dig a tomb and doesn't want outsiders to know about it."

The foreman grinned and said: "Not bad, you are pretty smart for such a young fellow. Follow me to your meal."

## Chapter 9 – Butterfly Lovers

Di Yun ate a full meal inside the kitchen. The foreman told him to wait by the corridor without wandering around. Di Yun agreed but he was actually full of curiosity and suspicion. He saw that the interior design of the house was surprisingly ordinary and the kitchen did not even have proper place for a furnace. It only had a large furnace leaning against a boiler; the tables and benches were also of extremely low-quality and did not match the exterior of the house in the least bit.

When it was night time, fewer people went inside the house. It all consisted of young and strong village people, everyone was clamorous during mealtimes. Di Yun followed the others and ate. Although he spoke the local dialect with extreme precision, the foreman and housekeeper were not in the least suspicious, thinking that he was just a local idler without a job.

After everyone finished their meal, Foreman Ping ordered everyone to gather round the main hall. "You should all put more effort into digging. Hopefully we will be blessed with good luck tonight. Whoever digs up anything useful will be rewarded generously."

Everyone agreed and picked up their tools. The sounds of shovels and spades digging against the earth sound filled the room. One young man spoke softly, "I have been digging for two months but haven't got anything at all. If there is really a treasure here, you will have to be really fortunate to excavate it."

Di Yun thought: "They want to dig for treasure? Why would there be a treasure in here?" He waited for the foreman to turn away before asking a senior fellow beside him, "Uncle, what treasure are they trying to dig?"

The senior replied: "This treasure is extraordinary. The owner of this house is hoping for good luck. He is not a local, but from afar he sensed an illumination of treasure gushing to the surface. He figured there must be a treasure here so he bought this piece of land. He was afraid that this information would be leaked so he first built a large house and ordered us to work at night and sleep during the day."

Di Yun nodded. "So that's how it is. Does senior know what kind of treasure this is?"

The senior said: "The foreman said that it is some sort of mythical treasure bowl. It is said that if you put one copper coin in the bowl, after one night, it will turn into a pot of copper coins; if you place one tael of gold inside the bowl, the next day it will become a pot of gold. Is that remarkable or what?"

Di Yun nodded repeatedly and said: "It really is a treasure! It really is a treasure!"

The senior continued: "The foreman told us to dig gently. It would be a disaster if one were to break the treasure bowl. The foreman said that after we dig up the treasure bowl, everyone will get to use it for one night. You can place whatever you want inside it. Young fellow, you should plan for yourself too and see what you would like to put."

Di Yun thought for a moment and said: "I am always hungry. I will place a grain of rice and it will become a pot of white rice the next day, wouldn't that be great?"

The senior laughed heartily and answered: "Very good! Very good!"

The foreman heard the sounds of laughter and shouted: "Don't waste time talking! Keep digging!"

Di Yun thought: "There is actually such a treasure bowl in this world? If the owner is not crazy, he must have fabricated this story to deceive people." He asked: "What is the surname of the owner? You said he is not a local?"

The senior replied, "Look over there, isn't the owner coming out right now?"

Di Yun followed the direction of the man's gaze. He saw someone coming out from the back hall. This person was slim, his eyes glimmered lively, his apparel was extremely gorgeous. This person was about 50 years old. Di Yun glanced at him once and felt his heart bouncing around his chest. He turned his head and did not dare to look again. He repeated to himself, "I've seen this person before... I've seen him before... who is he?" He felt that this person looked awfully familiar but he could not immediately recall where he saw him before.

That person said: "Everyone, tonight you should dig another three feet deep to the west. No matter if it is a scrap of paper or tiles and bricks, you must give them all to me."

Di Yun listened to his voice and came to a realization. At once he remembered. "Right, so it is him." He lowered his head and looked askance at him and thought: "Indeed, it really is him."

The owner of the house was in fact the old beggar who taught him the three sword stances.

Back then the beggar was wearing extremely ragged clothes with messy hair. His entire body was extremely filthy and sordid. Now at this point he was dressed as a luxurious rich man, his entire outfit was different, hence Di Yun could not recognize him until the man spoke out.

At once Di Yun jumped out of the pit and wanted to reunite with him. However, to tell him of everything he suffered throughout all these years in a serious manner could not be spoken impulsively. He thought: "This old beggar treated me very well. Back then I was already completely defeated by the bandit Lu Tong, it was thanks to him lending a hand. Later, he even taught me three stances of remarkable sword techniques which was why I managed to overcome the various disciples of the Wan clan. Now that I think of it, the three sword stances he taught me are really ordinary, but back then it was enough to save me from humiliation."

Now that he had fully completed the various martial arts of the Blood Sabre Sutra his knowledge increased drastically; even the three stances of "Liancheng Swordplay" that he learned back then were considered extremely mediocre.

Di Yun thought: "When I reunite with him today, I should really thank him. However, this is my teacher's old residence, what is he digging here for? Why did he build such a big house to deceive others? He used to be a beggar, how did he get so rich?" As he pondered further, he decided: "I should wait for another time. Although he is my benefactor, I am in no hurry to thank him. Isn't he afraid that my teacher will return? Could it be that... that my teacher is already dead?"

He had been raised by his teacher since childhood. When he thought that it was likely his teacher had already passed away, his eyes turned red.

All of a sudden, from the southeast direction a soft sound was heard. One of the diggers had come across something. The owner ventured into the pit and bent down to pick something up. Everyone in the group stopped digging and went over to see what it was. All they saw was that he was holding a very rusted piece of iron nail. He looked at it carefully for a long while before casting it aside and said: "Get moving, dig faster! Dig faster!"

Di Yun and the rest of the group spent the entire night digging. The owner concentrated his attention completely supervising on the side and it was not until daybreak before they stopped. The various villagers returned home; seven or eight of them lived too far away and opted to sleep on a mat in the east porch. Di Yun also slept in the porch. When afternoon came, everyone ate together. Di Yun was filthy all over and nobody wanted to stay close to him. Even during dinner they stayed far away from him. Di Yun could not have asked for more. He had learned to be cautious and prudent, he would no longer trust anyone easily. However, he had to pretend to be a worker and found it difficult. He knew that as time passed he would eventually give himself away. The fact that other people did not want to get close to him worked to his favour.

After dinner, Di Yun ventured into three small villages nearby to seek the whereabouts of his teacher. He saw several of his childhood friends who had now become thick and well-built adults working in the fields. He did not want to reveal his identity and did not greet them. He found a young teenager and asked him about the situation inside the large house.

The teenager said that the house was built last autumn; the owner of the house was very rich and wanted to dig the treasure bowl. However, he still had no luck in doing so. The youngster laughed as he explained, it was evident that the case of the treasure bowl had become the laughing stock around nearby areas. The youngster said: "What happened to the small cottages? Nobody has lived there for a long time. Naturally, when the large house was built, they took these cottages down."

After talking to this youngster, Di Yun felt depressed and full of doubts and suspicions. He could not figure out the intent behind the old beggar's actions. He wandered aimlessly around the open fields and passed by a vegetable field. The entire field was covered in dark green, it was filled with water spinaches.

*"Water Spinach! Water Spinach!"*

All of a sudden, he remembered the crisp and melodious voice that called out these words. Water spinach was a very common vegetable produced around Xiangxi. It grew very thick and long, and the stalk of the vegetable was hollow. His martial sister chose this nickname for him to mock his straightforward and carefree nature. He had not seen any water spinaches since leaving Xiangxi. He stared blankly for a long while before leaning over to pick one up. He smelt the juices of the vegetable and walked westward.

The west side was covered with desolate mountain ranges. The surface was rugged and filled with rocks and rubble, even wood-oil trees and tea trees could not be grown. Somewhere in the mountain range was a cave that nobody would ever go into. That was the place that he and Qi Fang would often play. He reminisced those days and slowly wandered toward the cave. He passed through two hills and passed by a large cave before he arrived at the smaller desolate cave. There was a cluster of tall grass that reached up to his shoulders that obstructed the cave entrance completely.



He felt depressed as he went inside the cave. He saw that the various objects around the cave were exactly the same as it used to be without the slightest movement, only that it was covered in dust.

Qi Fang used clay to build a clay person and used it to as a catapult to sling at birds. She also had a trap to capture wild rabbits. The short flute that she would play when she released the oxen was still placed on top of a rock inside the cave. On the other side was a basket of threads and needles, the scissors inside the basket was yellow and rusted.

During those years, every time winter came and the fields were closed, Di Yun would always weave straw-sandals or bamboo baskets. Qi Fang would sit beside him and make shoes. She would find various fragments of cloth and make it together into the sole of the shoe, then seam it together with a needle. Di Yun and his teacher's shoes both had dark green soles, while Qi Fang's own shoes would sometimes have an embroidered flower on top, while other times it would be an embroidered bird. That was what she would wear during New Year's, in ordinary times she would also wear shoes with green soles. If she were to work in the fields, then she would just be barefooted.

Di Yun casually picked up an old book from inside the basket. The title of the book was the four words "The Tang Poem Anthology". Di Yun and Qi Fang were not very literate and did not bother reading the Tang poetry, the book was only used by Qi Fang to press the shoes together and for embroidery. He casually opened the book and took out two paper patterns. It was a pair of butterflies that Qi Fang cut out as embroidery. In his heart he still remembered very clearly all the events that took place:

*A pair of large black and yellow butterflies would fly inside the cave. Sometimes it would fly east while sometimes it would fly west, but the two butterflies never separated. Qi Fang yelled: "Liangshan Bo, Zhu Yingtai<sup>3</sup>!" These butterflies must be a couple and fly together wherever they went, never separating.*

*Di Yun was in the middle of making a straw sandal when the pair of butterflies flew next to him. He raised the unfinished sandal and swatted the butterfly. One of the butterflies died at once. Qi Fang cried out in alarm and scolded: "What... what are you doing?"*

*Di Yun did not expect her to be so angry all of a sudden and did not know what to do. He said: "You... you like butterflies, I... I swatted one for you."*

*The butterfly dropped dead on the ground without moving while the other butterfly constantly spiralled around its body.*

*Qi Fang shouted: "Look at what you've done! You have sinned! The two of them were a couple, yet you separated them like this..."*

*When Di Yun saw her dim expression and heard her depressed voice, he felt very apologetic and sighed: "Ai, it is really my fault."*

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<sup>3</sup> "Liangshan Bo, Zhu Yingtai" is also the title of this chapter. But I changed it to "Butterfly Lovers" because that's the most common English translation. The story of these two characters are akin to that of Romeo and Juliet.

## Chapter 9 – Butterfly Lovers

Later on, Qi Fang copied the patterns on the dead butterfly and embroidered a paper butterfly on her shoes. Whenever it was Chinese New Year's, she would embroider a small wallet for him that had a pair of butterflies on it; yellow and black wings, the part of the wing near its body had a tint of red and green strings. He carried this wallet with him the whole time, until he went to prison in Jingzhou, when it was taken away by the guards.

As Di Yun held onto the paper butterfly, he could faintly hear the sounds of Qi Fang reprimanding him, *"Look at what you've done! You have sinned! The two of them were a couple, yet you separated them like this..."*

He stared blankly for a while before placing the paper butterfly back inside the book. He turned the pages and found that there were various red paper figures, there was a carp and three goats. It was used to decorate the windows during Chinese New Year, it was all cut out by Qi Fang.

He was about to take a closer look at one of the figures when he heard the sound of rocks being thrown several hundred feet away; someone was approaching. He thought: "Nobody ever comes here, could it be a wild animal?" He put the paper figure in his bosom.

He heard someone say: "This area is very desolate, no one will come here."

Another old voice replied: "Heh, the more desolate a place, the more likely someone will hide a treasure. We should search carefully."

Di Yun thought: "Why would they look for treasures here?" He snuck out of the cave and hid behind a large tree.

Shortly after, more people arrived at the scene. Di Yun made out that there were seven or eight people in total. He looked out from the tree and saw the person in front wore fresh and bright clothes. This person had an oily head and a powdery face and looked quite familiar. The person following behind him was holding an iron shovel. This person was tall with an imposing appearance. When Di Yun saw this person, anger surged out of his heart and he wanted to go out and strangle him to death.

This person was the one who took away his martial sister and sent him to prison. This person was the one who caused him so much suffering. It was Wan Gui.

What was he doing here?

There was a young fellow beside him. It was his younger martial brother, Shen Cheng.

The two of them approached together. Behind them were all the disciples of the Wan clan—Lu Lu Kun, Sun Jun, Bu Yuan, Wu Kan, and Feng Tan—they were all here.

The Wan clan had eight disciples in total. Second disciple Zhou Qi was killed by Di Yun inside the abandoned garden in Jingzhou, so only seven remained. Di Yun was very perplexed. "What are they all trying to dig? Could it be the treasure bowl?"

He heard Shen Cheng say, "Teacher, there is a cave over there."

The old voice replied: "Is that so?" His voice was filled with joy that he could hardly suppress. This person followed behind a very tall person over there. It was "Five Cloud Hand" Wan Zhenshan. Di Yun had not seen him for many years but saw that he was full of spirit and his footsteps were firm. He did not look very old at all.

Wan Zhenshan entered the cave first, then his disciples followed behind. Voices were heard inside the cave.

"There is someone living here!"

"The dust is so thick, nobody has come here for many years."

"No, no. Look! There are new footprints over there."

"Hmm, if there are new footprints, that means someone was here not too long ago."

"It must be Uncle Yan, he... he stole the Liancheng Manual."

Di Yun was both startled and laughed: "Why do they want to find the Liancheng Manual? How come they can't find it after looking for so long? Who is Uncle Yan? My teacher said that his second martial brother Yan Daping had disappeared for many years without a trace, it's likely that he is no longer in this world, how could he steal the Liancheng Manual? Those footprints were clearly left by me, they are guessing in the completely wrong direction."

He heard Wan Zhenshan say: "Everyone, do not panic. Search carefully around the vicinity."

Another said: "If Uncle Yan was here, why didn't he take these things with him?"

"That Qi Zhangfa is really a crafty schemer. He hid the sword manual here so that people wouldn't find it easily."

"Of course he is a crafty schemer, else why would he be called 'Iron Lock Across the River'?"

Wan Zhenshan said: "Just now we followed that country folk here. That person was extremely swift and disappeared quickly without a trace. That person may be up to something."

Wan Gui said: "The locals know the mountain paths well, he probably took a shortcut somewhere. If not for him, even if we searched for another year and a half, we would still not find this place."

Di Yun thought: "So they actually followed me here, no wonder they were able to find such a remote cave in the mountains."

He heard booming and roaring inside the cave. The people inside were searching thoroughly, but all they did was throw around a few pieces of ragged items and move its position. Then followed that they used an iron shovel to start digging, but under the cave was completely filled with hard rocks, how could they dig? Wan Zhenshan said: "There is nothing here. Let's go out and come up with another plan."

Di Yun saw the various disciples follow Wan Zhenshan out of the cave. They reached a creek beside the mountain and sat on top of a rock. Di Yun did not want to be discovered so he did not dare to get too close. He could not hear what the eight of them were saying. After a while, the eight of them got up and left.

Di Yun thought: "They are looking for the Liancheng Manual and suspect that my Uncle Yan Daping has stolen it. My teacher's cottage has become a large house and the old beggar wants to look for a treasure bowl... ah! That's it, that's it!"

A ray of light flashed through his mind as he suddenly came to a startling conclusion. "The old beggar is trying to find the treasure bowl, but he is actually trying to find the sword manual. He believes that the sword manual was taken by my teacher, that's why he is digging there. Because he wanted to prevent others from noticing, he built a large house in place of the cottage and dug inside the house to prevent suspicion. The rumours that he is digging for a treasure bowl are obviously fabricated by the country folk."

Then he thought: "That day when Wan Zhenshan celebrated his birthday, the old beggar appeared both during the day and at night. It turns out that he actually has an ulterior motive. Hmm, if Wan Zhenshan and his group cannot find the sword manual, have they tried searching inside the large house? It is likely that they have already searched there. This incident is not over yet, I should go back to the house and wait and see what happens next. There is definitely something wrong!"

"But what about my teacher? His house has been completely torn down by others, how could he be unaware of this? And what about martial sister? Heh, she's probably still in Jingzhou living a happy and prosperous life as the lady of the house. If the Wan family wants to search her father's cottage, they would most likely not let her know about it. I wonder what she's doing right now?"

At night, the large house was once again illuminated by oil lamps. Over a dozen country folk picked up their shovels and began digging. Di Yun mixed in with the crowd and began to dig as well. He did not put much effort into it, nor did he slack off. He wanted to be as unnoticed as possible. His hair was fluffy and he did not shave his facial hair; over half his face was covered with hair, and he also smeared plaster around his face, so he was changed beyond recognition. He recalled when Wan Zhenshan and the others followed him during the day, and wondered if they actually recognized him. Thereupon he took the white headband and the green belt around his waist and swapped its positions. Tonight, they were digging closer to the north. The old beggar put both hands behind his back and paced himself around the site. Obviously, he looked nothing like an old beggar now; his clothes were gorgeous and he wore a jasper ring on his left hand. There was also a large piece of jade hanging on his belt.

All of a sudden, Di Yun heard the sound of someone approaching from outside. There were people approaching from all directions. As these people were still some distance away, the old beggar did not notice yet. Di Yun turned around and looked askance at the beggar; he heard the sounds of footsteps approaching closer and closer. Five... six... seven... eight... eight people in total. It was Wan Zhenshan and his seven disciples. The old beggar still did not notice, but Di Yun had long listened attentively, as if the eight of them were right in front of him, but it seemed as if the old beggar was deaf.

Five years ago, Di Yun respected the old beggar like a deity. He merely learned three stances from the beggar and it was enough to utterly defeat the eight disciples of the Wan clan without giving

them any leeway. But now Di Yun thought: "How could his martial arts have gotten so much worse? Could it be that this isn't actually him? Did I mistake him for someone else? No, I'm definitely not mistaken." Di Yun never would have guessed that his martial arts had reached such an extremely high level. What he heard as distinct sounds were merely whispers to others.

The eight of them got closer and closer. Di Yun was perplexed. "The eight of them are sure laughable, who wouldn't be able to tell that they were coming? Yet they are still pretending to be sneaky and stealthy." The eight of them got closer by another hundred feet or so when all of a sudden, the old beggar trembled slightly and slanted his ear to listen for any movement. Di Yun thought: "Now he hears it? Is he deaf or what?" In truth, the eight of them were still very far away. If it were one or two years ago, Di Yun still would not have heard it even if they were closer.

The eight of them gradually approached. They would walk and stop every few steps. It was obvious that they were trying to prevent themselves from being discovered. However, the old beggar had already figured it out; he turned around and picked up a crutch leaning against the wall. It was an extremely thick dragon-wood cane.

All of a sudden, the eight of them rushed forward and encircled the beggar on all sides. With a loud crash, Wan Gui was the first to strike, while Shen Cheng and Bu Yuan followed behind. The seven of them all wielded long swords and surrounded the beggar.

The old beggar laughed: "Very good, my martial brother is here too. Brother Wan, why don't you come in?"

A long sound of laughter came from outside the house as this person slowly walked in. It was indeed 'Five Cloud Hand' Wan Zhenshan. The two of them were on the opposite sides of the large pit and sized each other up. After a while, Wan Zhenshan laughed and said: "Brother Yan, we have not seen each other for many years. Looks like you're a rich man now."

These words deeply drilled itself into Di Yun's ears. At once he was thrown into a state of confusion. He thought: "What? This old beggar is actually... actually Second Uncle... Second Uncle Yan Daping?"

He heard the old beggar reply: "Brother, I have made a little bit of money. I take it that you have completed many good trades throughout the years."

Wan Zhenshan said: "Thanks to your lucky influence. Hey, little brats, why haven't you kowtowed to your martial uncle?"

Lu Kun and the others kneeled down and said: "Your disciple kowtows in salute to Uncle Yan."

The old beggar laughed: "Good... good. It is quite inconvenient to kowtow while holding a sword in hand, you may be excused."

Di Yun thought: "This person is really Uncle Yan. Him... him?"

Wan Zhenshan said: "Brother, are you operating a coal mine here? Why did you dig such a large pit?"

Yan Daping chuckled and said: "Elder Brother has guessed wrong. Your younger brother I have a lot of enemies, I am here to seek refuge. There are two purposes to digging this pit. Firstly, if I

successfully kill my enemy, I can bury him here without having to dig. And supposing that your brother I am killed by my enemies, this pit will also serve as my burial place.”

Wan Zhenshan said: “Excellent, younger brother has really thought this through. But you are not a fat person, I think this pit is large enough, you don’t have to keep digging.”

Yan Daping smiled gently and said: “It is enough to bury one person, but I am afraid it won’t be enough for eight.”

Di Yun listened as the two of them crossed verbal swords, opposing each other measure for measure. He remembered what Ding Dian once told him. *“The three of them were responsible for killing their teacher. They are ruthless enough to kill their benefactor, what sort of camaraderie would they have for each other?”* According to Brother Ding, they found the Liangcheng Manual but did not find the mnemonics. The mnemonics are a bunch of numbers; the first number is “4”, the second number is “41”, the third number is “33”, the fourth number is “53”. Brother Ding passed away before he finished saying all the numbers. Did they not already find these numbers? Why are they still searching?”

Wan Zhenshan said: “My good martial brother, we have been in the same clan for many years, I trust that you know my intentions. I have long seen past your scheme, what is the use of beating around the bush? Hand it over!” As he said this, he extended his hand forward.

Yan Daping shook his head. “I have not found it yet. The schemes of Old Qi the Third, the two of us martial siblings cannot compare. I cannot figure out where he hid the sword manual.”

Di Yun trembled again. “Could it be that the three of them combined forces to take the sword manual, but my teacher took it away from them? But after so many years, how come there wasn’t any news? Right, it must be that my teacher is extremely clever, they could not find it. Since my teacher is not here, naturally he would take the sword manual with him, why would he hide it inside the house? Wouldn’t it be foolish to search around like this?” However he knew that Yan Daping and Wan Zhenshan were not idiots, they were probably ten times smarter than he was. So what kind of scheme was hidden in this plot? He could not guess, and he knew he didn’t have to.

Wan Zhenshan laughed out loud and said: “Brother, why do you insist on playing dumb? Everyone calls third martial brother ‘Iron Lock Across the River’ and claims that he is the greatest schemer, but I say that actually you second martial brother are even more superior! Hand it over!” He extended his right hand forward again.

Yan Daping patted his pocket and said: “The three of us have been martial siblings for so many years, is there really a need to separate our belongings? Elder brother, if your younger brother I have found this manual, I would not be able to handle it by myself. I would definitely need you to take care of the situation, I can only help you from the sidelines and reap some small benefits. However, if elder brother is the one who finds it, hehe, elder brother has so many disciples in his clan who have decent martial arts, I’m afraid that even if I want to lend a hand, it would be redundant.”

Wan Zhenshan creased his eyebrows and said: “What did you get from the cave?”

Yan Daping was perplexed. “What cave? There is a cave nearby?”

"Brother, the both of us are getting up there in age now. Is there really a need to be so impolite to each other? I ask that you take it out and we can discuss it in detail together. Henceforth we will endure both fortune and misfortune together, what do you say?"

"That is strange. Why do you insist I was the one that took it? If I already found it, why would I still be digging here?"

"You are full of devilish tricks and cunning stratagems, how would I know?"

"How can the belongings of third brother be so easily recovered? From the looks of it, it's probably not in this house. If I dig for another three days and nothing comes up, I will not persist."

"Hah! From the looks of it, you want to dig for another half a month or so, there's no need to pretend."

Yan Daping's face changed colors as if he was to become hostile. But after having second thoughts, he regained his composure and said: "What will it take for you to believe me?" At once he put his crutch on the side and took off his gown. He shook the gown hard several times, some clanging sounds were heard as two taels of silver and a snuff bottle fell on the ground.

Wan Zhenshan said: "How would you be dumb enough as to hide it on your person? Even if it was on your person, it would not be in your gown, it would be close to your skin."

Yan Daping sighed. "If elder brother really does not believe me, then you can search around if you want."

Wan Zhenshan said: "Excuse me then." He signalled Wan Gui and Shen Cheng with his eyes. The two of them nodded and put their swords back in its sheaths, then walked to both sides of Yan Daping. Wan Zhenshan gave a glance at Bu Yuan and Lu Kun and the two of them walked in front of Yan Daping, tightly holding onto their sword hilt.

Yan Daping patted his shirt pocket and said: "Please search!"

Wan Gui said: "Pardon me then, uncle." He extended his hands to feel Yan Daping's pocket. All of a sudden, he let out a shriek and immediately withdrew his hands. Under the flame one could see a three-inch long scorpion crawling on his finger. At once he flipped his hand and smashed it against the side of the pit, and with a loud clap, the scorpion was smashed into pieces. But the back of his hand was struck with poison and swelled up at once. He wanted to flaunt heroism and did not groan, but beads of sweat were seeping out of his forehead like soya beans.

Yan Daping was alarmed. "Ow, Niece Wan, where did you find this poisonous creature? This is a mottling poison scorpion, it is extremely toxic. You cannot play with these things! Brother, quickly, do you have an antidote? If you don't hurry, it will be too late! This is no good!"

The back of Wan Gui's hand was swollen from red to purple, then purple to black. A thin red line slowly extended upwards toward his arm. Wan Zhenshan knew that he had fallen into Yan Daping's trap. He could do nothing but hold in his anger and said: "Your elder brother is impressed, I

surrender to you. Please take out the antidote and we will go our separate ways. I won't bother you anymore."

Yan Daping said: "Once upon a time I had the antidote, but it's been so many years ago, now I have misplaced it. I will look for it in a few days, maybe I will find it. Otherwise, I can go to the Daming Prefecture and look for the prescription for you, that could work too. I greatly value our brotherhood."

When Wan Zhenshan heard this, he was so angry he felt his chest was about to explode. The toxic of such a poisonous scorpion was extremely lethal and capable of taking one's life in the matter of a few hours. Once the red line makes its way to a person's heart, that person would die immediately. When he said what "I will look for it in a few days" and spoke of going to the Daming Prefecture in Hubei to find a prescription over a thousand li away, it was clearly intended to insult him and even went as far as to say "I greatly value our brotherhood". But at this moment as he watched the life of his beloved son hang by a thread, he could do nothing but suppress his anger. When a gentleman seeks revenge, ten years is not too late.

Wan Zhenshan finally said: "Looks like I have no choice but to succumb to your requests. Why don't you tell me what you want?"

Yan Daping slowly put his gown back on and buttoned it. Then he said: "Brother, what could I possibly want from you? You can do whatever you want."

Wan Zhenshan thought: "Today I will let you take the advantage, in the future you will realize what I am really capable of." Then he said: "Very well then, henceforth the one surnamed Wan will never see you again. If I ask anything of you, I will no longer be considered a person."

Yan Daping said: "I dare not accept such a condition. Your brother only has one request: the Liancheng Manual ought to be given to me. If in the future I am lucky enough to find it, naturally there is nothing more to say, but even if you find it, you should let me have it."

The toxicity level of Wan Gui was slowly increasing. He began to feel faint and he could not help but stagger wildly in pain. Lu Kun shouted: "Brother! Brother!" He extended his hands and ripped open his sleeves. He saw that the red line had already made its way to his underarm. He turned around to Wan Zhenshan and shouted: "Teacher! We should agree to anything today!"

Wan Zhenshan said: "Very well, the Liancheng Manual will belong to you. Congratulations! Congratulations!" The last two words were uttered with extreme feelings of injustice.

Yan Daping said: "Very well then, I will go inside and search. Who knows? Maybe I will find the antidote you are looking for. That will depend if Niece Wan has been blessed with good luck." After he said this he turned around and went inside. Wan Zhenshan signalled Lu Kun and Bu Yuan to follow him inside.

After a long while, the three of them still didn't come out, nor were there any noises. Wan Gui was unconscious and was supported by Shen Cheng, he couldn't even move anymore. Wan Zhenshan became anxious and said to Feng Tan: "Go inside and take a look."



Feng Tan replied, "Yes!" He was about to go inside when Yan Daping came outside, his face full of glee.

"Not bad! Not bad! Looks like I found it after all!" he raised a small porcelain bottle with his hands and continued: "This is the antidote best used to cure the toxicity of scorpions. Niece Wan, you are very fortunate. From now on you should not play with these things!" He walked beside Wan Gui and removed the bottle cork and smeared the black powder on the back of his hand.

This antidote was really effective. In no time at all, black blood started seeping out of the wound, slowly dripping on the ground. The more black blood that dripped, the more the red line on his arm regressed, until it turned to his elbow and back down to his wrist.

Wan Zhenshan breathed a sigh of relief and felt more relaxed. He was also very angry; although his son's life was no longer in jeopardy, he had lost this battle miserably, already subdued by his opponent without so much as a chance to fight back. After a while, Wan Gui's eyes slowly opened and called out, "Father!"

Yan Daping sealed the porcelain bottle and placed it back in his bosom. He got his crutch and stomped it a few times, laughing: "This is good. Niece Wan, from now on you should be a good person. Whenever you extend your hand into someone's pocket to search, you must be extra careful!"

Wan Zhenshan said to Shen Cheng: "Tell them to come out."

Shen Cheng said, "Yes!" He went inside the hall then shouted: "Brother Lu, Brother Bu, come out! We are leaving now."

All he heard were sounds of moaning but they did not come out. Sun Jun and Shen Cheng did not wait for their teacher's orders and rushed inside at once. They supported Lu Kun and Bu Yuan back outside. The two of them were deathly pale; one had a broken leg while the other had a broken foot. It was obvious that they suffered at the hands of Yan Daping.

Wan Zhenshan was extremely furious. He already had the intent of taking Yan Daping's life, but now he felt even more justified in doing so. How could he possibly repress this surging stream of anger in his heart? At once he unsheathed his long sword, the edge of the blade glimmering a dark color as he rushed to pierce Yan Daping's throat.

Di Yun had never seen Wan Zhenshan execute his martial arts. When he saw how this attack was so fierce and steady, he thought: "This strike does not seem to have any flaws." At this point Di Yun's cultivation was already at an extraordinary level. Although he was not taught by anyone, when someone attacks, he can still naturally tell if this person's strike had any weaknesses or not.

Yan Daping slanted his body to evade, then with his left hand he grabbed the lower end of the crutch while his right hand held its dragon head. As soon as he separated his hands, a soft click was heard; a white flash of dazzling light appeared as he produced a long sword in his hand. It turns out that the dragon head of the crutch was actually the hilt of the sword, the crutch hid the sword and acted as a scabbard. Now that he had a sword, at once he countered the attack. *Ting! Ting Ting!* The sounds of sword clashes were relentless, the two martial brothers fought on the side of a slope and

fought intensely. After exchanging several stances, they both felt that the terrain was narrow, and at once both leaped into the pit.

When the villagers saw the two of them vie against each other, they were already startled. Now that they saw they were engaged in such an intense battle, the villagers were so scared they hid in the corner of the room, not daring to make any noise. Di Yun also pretended to be afraid, but he watched his two martial uncles very carefully.

After the two of them exchanged seven or eight stances, Di Yun thought: "My two martial uncles' internal energies are inadequate; although their stances have been exhausted, even if they receive the Liancheng Manual, I'm afraid that they won't find any use for it, unless this manual was capable of boosting one's internal energy. But it is a sword manual, so it is likely only for sword techniques."

He watched another few stances and became even more perplexed. "The martial arts of Liu Chengfeng, Hua Tiegang, and the other members of Luohua Liushui are much higher than that of my two martial uncles. My two martial uncles only focus on the exquisiteness of techniques, disregarding their compatibility with internal energy, what sense does that make? When my teacher taught me swordplay, he also taught me the same way. It looks like those three martial brothers all learned the same moves. This type of martial arts will be very effective if they encounter someone much weaker than them, but if their opponent has powerful internal energy, their extremely exquisite and fluctuating techniques would be rendered useless. What's the point of learning swords? What's the point of learning swords?"

Then followed that Sun Jun, Feng Tan, and Wu Kan all unsheathed their swords and rushed forward, making a battle of four-against-one.

Yan Daping laughed heartily and said: "Good! Good! You have really made significant progress elder brother, resorting to gathering the younger generation to assault your younger brother." He pretended as if it was no big deal, but it was obvious that his sword movements became more sluggish.

Di Yun thought: "In terms of swordplay, my martial uncles each have their own strong points. The 'Piercing Shoulder Stance', 'Slap-in-the-face Stance', and 'Releasing Sword Stance' that Uncle Yan taught me are incredibly effective in dealing with disciples of the Wan clan. However, it is completely useless when matched against Uncle Wan himself. Ah, they don't understand that if they only focus on the exquisiteness of sword techniques, without the proper internal energy foundation, what use would it be? It is completely useless. This is really strange, even a dumb person like me understands this principle; they are incredibly intelligent, how could they not understand? Could it be that I am the one who's confused?"

All of a sudden, a flash of light crossed his mind. "Brother Ding once told me the origins of the Heavenly Glow Manual. If my grand-teacher Mei Niansheng understands this principle, why did he not teach it to his three disciples? Could it be... could it be... could it be..." As he said repeated himself three times, a cold sweat exuded from his back, he shivered and his body trembled slightly.

An old man beside him constantly prayed. "Amitabha, Amitabha, please let there not be any casualties. Young one, don't be afraid, don't be afraid." The old man saw Di Yun trembling as he watched the battle and offered comforting words, but actually the old man was really scared as well.

Di Yun already realized the truth in his heart. But the truth was so treacherous and sinister that he did not want to think about it, nor did he want to establish a logical conclusion with this truth. But since he realized the crux of this scheme, naturally the bits and pieces would all come together. Wan Zhenshan, Yan Daping, Sun Jun, Feng Tan... every time these people executed a sword stance, it would further verify his conclusions. "This is right, this is right... it must be like this. But, what if it isn't? Could my teacher really be this vicious? It can't be, it can't be... but, if it wasn't like this, then how could this happen? This is extremely perplexing."

Many pictures flashed through his mind as they pieced themselves together. "All these years, it had been the case that I would practice swordplay with martial sister while teacher gave pointers from the sidelines. Every time my teacher taught me a technique, it would be ingenious. I would practice it thoroughly; the second time my teacher taught it, it would be completely different. Although the sword techniques were profound, it would be very different from the first technique. Back then, I thought it was because teacher's swordplay was so exquisite that it could not be predicted, why the two sword stances were completely different, I never understood."

Then a surge of pain struck his heart. "Teacher intentionally pointed me in the wrong direction, he intentionally taught me second-rate sword techniques. His ability is actually much higher, but the sword stances he taught me were not impressive at all. His... his... Uncle Yan's martial arts should be around the same as my teacher's, yet the three stances he taught me were much superior to anything my teacher taught me..."

"Why did Uncle Yan teach me these three sword stances? Clearly he did not harbour good intentions. Right... right, he wanted to raise Uncle Wan's suspicions. He wanted Uncle Wan to fight with my teacher..."

"Uncle Wan did the same thing. His sword techniques are much different from those of his various disciples, but... why would he even lie to his own son? Ai, obviously if he isn't teaching his other disciples, he can't teach his son, otherwise his scheme would be easily seen through."

Yan Daping pushed forward and twirled the sword with his right wrist. He made seven full circles in rapid haste and attacked Wan Zhenshan's chest. Wan Zhenshan slanted his body to dodge the attack, overcoming the circles horizontally; stabbing and slashing, he completely overcame all seven circles.

Di Yun watched from the side and thought: "These seven circles were completely redundant. The last strike was aimed to pierce the left side of Uncle Wan's chest, but why not just pierce through directly? Wouldn't that be faster and more intense? Uncle Wan inclined his body to strike and stab consecutively, with seven stances he managed to overcome the seven sword circles of Uncle Yan. Although it appears clever, it is actually extremely stupid. If he had just attacked Uncle Yan's stomach, he would have won already."

Suddenly, a scene swept past his ocean of thoughts:

When he would practise swords with his martial sister, she would have many kinds of varied sword stances. He did not remember everything that his teacher taught him and would be forced into a state of confusion, retreating constantly. Qi Fang would swipe three times with her sword in succession, causing him to be flustered and faint with blurred vision. When he saw that he could not counter his opponent's moves, he would no longer be able to think of the stances his teacher taught him. Instead he would casually defend and then counterattack with his own strike...

When Qi Fang unleashed the two stances of “The Wind Suddenly Blows” and “The Mountain Escapes like a Cloth” and brandished her sword in a circular motion to defend, although Di Yun’s stances were simple and spontaneous, not in the least complying with his teacher’s instructions, yet Qi Fang’s complex and exquisite sword stance could actually not handle it. He would stab directly to his martial sister’s shoulder. Without having time to retract his attack, his teacher suddenly leapt into the fray and holding a stick of firewood in his hands, knocked the sword out of his hands.

He and Qi Fang were both so startled their faces changed colours. Qi Zhangfa reprimanded him greatly for not following with his teachings, saying how it was outrageous that he would just brandish and slash his sword in such a disorderly fashion.

At that time he once thought: “I did not use the sword according to his method, yet why was I able to win?” But once that thought passed he understood. “Obviously, it is because martial sister’s swordplay is not up to par. If I had encountered a formidable opponent, there is no way I would be able to win attacking in such a way.” Back then, there was no way that he could have figured out that his own simple sword techniques were actually more practical than the various complex and fancy stances taught by his teacher.

Now that he thought about it, he had a completely different mindset. With his current martial arts abilities, he could clearly see the truth: Wan Zhenshan and Yan Daping executed various fancy sword stances that were actually completely useless, and further, the stances Wan Zhenshan taught to his disciples, and the stances taught to Di Yun and his martial sister by his teacher, consisted of even more useless stances. It goes without saying that grand-teacher Mei Niansheng had long realized his three disciples were schemers, so when he passed on his swordplay, he deliberately guided them towards a devious path. And when Wan Zhenshan and Qi Zhangfa taught their disciples, whether intentionally or unintentionally, they too brought their disciples even deeper into this path.

When executing a useless sword stance during a battle, not only is it a waste of time, it also gives your opponent an opportunity to strike back and gain the upper hand. It is like putting your life at the hands of your opponent. Why are his grand-teacher, teacher, and martial uncles so vicious? Why are they so sinister?

“Would they have animosity towards their own children? Would they intentionally mislead their disciples to a devious path? That can’t be it. There has to be an even greater reason, it must be an extremely treacherous conspiracy. Could it be all for the Liancheng Manual?

“That should be it. Uncle Wan and Uncle Yan are even willing to kill their own teacher for the manual, and now they are willing to kill each other.”

Indeed, they both wanted to kill each other. The battle in the pit became increasingly pressing and intense. It was hard to tell who had better swordplay between Wan Zhenshan and Yan Daping, but with the disciples of the Wan clan assisting alongside, it obviously increased the pressure on Yan Daping. The battle made its way to the edge; Sun Jun aimed to stab Yan Daping from behind. Yan Daping returned his sword to resist, the edge of the blade following its momentum downwards. Sun Jun let out a screech as his web was injured, then followed that his long sword fell on the ground. At the same time, Wan Zhenshan seized the opportunity to strike and stabbed Yan Daping squarely on his right arm.

Yan Daping sustained injuries on his right arm and urgently switched the sword to his left hand, but naturally, he was not used to using a sword with his left hand, nor could the wound on his right arm be considered minor. Blood kept spurting out of his wound and covered half his body in blood. After another seven or eight stances, he was stabbed on the left arm as well.

The crowd of villagers watched in horror and their faces turned deathly pale. They all wanted to run away from the house, yet no one dared to make a move.

Wan Zhenshan was determined to slaughter his martial brother today, and each strike was executed with increasing intensity. *Chi!* The left side of Yan Daping's chest was stabbed.

It would only be a matter of another few stances before Yan Daping would be killed by the sword of Wan Zhenshan, yet he clenched his teeth and continued the battle soaked in blood, not once begging for mercy. He had been in the same clan as his martial brother for over a dozen years, and after leaving the clan, the two of them vied against each other for another dozen years. He knew his martial brother extremely well; if he were to beg for mercy, he would only be humiliated even further—it would be completely ineffective.

Di Yun thought: "That year in Jingzhou, Uncle Yan helped me defeat the bandit Lu Tong with a simple rice bowl, and he further taught me three sword stances so that I would not be humiliated by the disciples of the Wan clan. Although it is likely that it was done with a malicious intent, I still received his favour. I cannot simply let him die like this." At once he pretended to tremble violently, then he picked up a shovel full of dirt on the ground.

Wan Zhenshan was about to stab Yan Daping again. Yan Daping's body was swaying and would not be able to dodge this attack. Di Yun lightly shook the shovel on his hands and sent a cluster of yellow dirt towards Wan Zhenshan. This cluster of dirt was reinforced with profound internal energy; when Wan Zhenshan was hit by its force, he could not keep his balance and fell backwards on the ground.

Everyone in the room was taken by surprise. Nobody knew where this cluster of dirt came from. Di Yun followed through with another few shovels of dirt and threw it on several oil lamps on the wall. In an instant, the entire room was covered in darkness. Everyone cried out in horror. Di Yun leapt forward and rushed outside with Yan Daping.

When Di Yun made his way outside the house, he carried Yan Daping on his back and galloped his way up the mountain.

Di Yun was extremely familiar with the surrounding area. He made his way up a very desolate and difficult path in the mountain. Yan Daping rested on his back and felt a gust of wind blowing past his ears, as if he was like mist soaring above the clouds. He thought he was in a dream, he did not believe that a person with such a high level of martial arts existed in this world. Wan Zhenshan and his disciples shouted and made chase, but they trailed further and further behind Di Yun.

Di Yun carried Yan Daping on his back and climbed the highest mountain peak nearby. The peak was extremely precipitous and steep, Di Yun had never made his way up here before.

*From afar, he gazed on a mountain peak with Qi Fang. This peak was completely obscured by clouds. They discussed whether there were monsters or deities on the peak. Qi Fang said: "If there comes a day where you wrong me, I will climb up this peak and never come down."*

*Di Yun said: "Alright then, I won't come down either."*

*Qi Fang teased: "Water Spinach! If you are willing to stay on the peak with me and never come down, then I won't have to climb the peak in the first place!"*

Back then Di Yun laughed foolishly, but now he thought: "I am forever willing to be with you, yet you don't want to be with me..."

He placed Yan Daping down on the ground and asked: "Do you have any pain relief medicine?"

Yan Daping bent his body to pay his respects. "May I ask for benefactor's honourable surname? I, Yan Daping, have been graced with benefactor's assistance today. How could I ever repay your kindness?"

Di Yun did not dare to accept his martial uncle's courtesy and knelt down to return his politeness. "Elder need not be too courteous, junior is not deserving of such an honour. Junior is a nameless individual, there is no need for you to repay such a small favour."

Yan Daping wanted to know his name, but Di Yun did not want to fabricate a name, nor did he want to give out his real name.

Yan Daping figured that his benefactor would not reveal his name so he did not persist. He took out some pain relief medicine from his bosom and gently smeared it on his three wounds. He was a bit fearful as he recalled: "If he did not rescue me in time, I would no longer be in this world."

Di Yun said: "Junior has a few things he does not understand and wishes to ask for elder's guidance."

Yan Daping urgently said: "Benefactor should not call me an elder anymore. If you have any questions, I, Yan Daping, will wholehearted inform you without half a word of deception."

Di Yun said: "That is for the best then. May I ask elder, were you the one who built that big house?"

"Yes," replied Yan Daping.

Di Yun asked: "Elder employed many villagers to dig a large pit, naturally in search for the Liancheng Manual. May I ask if this manual has been uncovered?"

Yan Daping trembled inwardly as he thought: "So he only rescued me because of the Liancheng Manual." Then he answered: "I have spent countless efforts but have yet to find even a trace of it. Benefactor is intelligent, I do not dare to hide the truth from you. If I really had the manual, I would offer it to you at once. You saved my life, how would I dare to cherish such worldly possessions?"

Di Yun shook his hands repeatedly and explained: "I am not looking for the manual. To be honest, although my martial arts cannot be considered exceptional, I do not believe that this Liancheng Manual is capable of benefiting my martial arts progression greatly."

Yan Daping said: "Right! Right! Benefactor's martial arts have reached perfection, you could be considered to be matchless under heaven. This Liancheng Manual is merely an ordinary sword manual. The reason my martial brothers and I seek this manual is because it belongs to our clan and we respect it greatly. But from the perspective of outsiders, this manual is not worth mentioning."

Di Yun could hear from his tone that it was spoken tongue-in-cheek, although he did not want to expose him at this moment. He asked: "I heard that your younger martial brother Qi Zhangfa used to live in this house. This elder's name is 'Iron Lock Across the River', may I ask what this means?" He had been with his teacher since he was young and respected his teacher greatly as an honest and sincere countryman. But Ding Dian said that his teacher was extremely treacherous, he had to ask this question to confirm whether Ding Dian was misled by rumours.

Yan Daping answered: "My younger martial brother's nickname is indeed 'Iron Lock Across the River'. This nickname was made because others believe he is a multifarious schemer and an extremely cruel individual. He is like a long iron chain locked on a boat in the river; the meaning is that the boat can neither move forward or backwards."

Di Yun grieved inwardly. "Brother Ding was right, my teacher is really such a person. I have been deceived by him since I was small, and he never revealed to me his true colours. But... but he has always treated me well, he didn't really deceive me." He held on to a glimmer of hope and asked: "This nickname that people in the realm gave to him may not be reliable, maybe it was given to him by his enemies. But you are his martial brother and practiced the same skills as him, you must know his character quite well. What is he like as a person?"

Yan Daping sighed: "I do not want to speak poorly of my martial brother, but since benefactor raised the question, I must answer truthfully. Although my Brother Qi looks like a sluggish person, he is actually an intelligent schemer, else how would the Liancheng Manual fall into his hands?"

Di Yun nodded his head. After a long while, he said: "How do you know the Liancheng Manual is in his possession? Did you see it with your own eyes?"

Yan Daping said: "I did not see it with my own eyes, but I have carefully considered and know that he definitely has it."

Di Yun asked: "I heard that you like to pretend to be a beggar, is that true?"

Yan Daping was taken aback and mused: "This person is impressive, he even knows this." Then he answered: "Benefactor sure has a way to get reliable information. It looks like I can't hide anything from you. Back then I thought that if the Liancheng Manual was not in the hands of Brother Wan, then it must be in Brother Qi's possession. Hence I disguised myself as a beggar and lived near Xiangxi and Hubei to investigate."

Di Yun said: "Why did you think that the two of them had it?"

Yan Daping said: "Before my teacher died, he passed the manual on to the three of us..."

## Chapter 9 – Butterfly Lovers

Di Yun recalled Ding Dian told him about the night at Yangtze. The three of them Wan, Yan, and Qi joined forces to kill their teacher, Mei Niansheng. He snorted in contempt and said: “Did he really give it to you personally? I’m afraid that... that is not likely. Did he die of natural causes?”

Yan Daping jumped up suddenly in alarm. He pointed and asked: “You... you are... Ding... Ding... Mister Ding?” The news of Ding Dian burying Mei Niansheng had eventually leaked, so when Yan Daping heard his benefactor accuse him of killing his own teacher, he thought this person was Ding Dian.

Di Yun replied calmly, “I am not Ding Dian. Brother Ding loathes injustice greatly. He... he personally saw the three of you join forces to kill your own teacher. If I was Brother Ding, I would not have saved you today. I would let you die by the hands of Wan Zhenshan.”

Yan Daping was bewildered and asked: “Then who are you?”

Di Yun replied: “You do not need to worry about that. If you do something bad, people will inevitably hear about it. After you joined forces to kill your teacher, you stole the Liancheng Manual. What happened next?”

Yan Daping trembled and asked: “Since you already know everything, why do you have to ask?”

Di Yun said: “I only know some things but not the whole story. I ask that you answer me truthfully. If you lie to me, I will have a way to find the truth.”

Yan Daping was both startled and afraid. “How would I dare to deceive my benefactor? After the three of us martial brothers got the Liancheng Manual, we looked into it and realized that we only had the sword manual but not the mnemonics, it was rendered useless. Hence we tried to pursue the mnemonics...”

Di Yun thought: “According to Brother Ding, this sword mnemonic has a hidden relation with a great treasure. Mei Niansheng, Lady Ling, and Brother Ding are no longer in this world. There is no one left who knows the secret, you guys are searching in vain.”

Yan Daping continued: “The three of us did not believe each other. Every night we would sleep in the same room, and the sword manual would be locked in an iron chest. We threw the key to the chest into the river and placed the chest inside the drawer of a table. The iron chest was also linked to three small iron chains connected to each of us. Whoever moved their iron chain, the other two would definitely know.”

Di Yun sighed. “You have really thought this through carefully.”

Yan Daping said: “We never would have guessed that chaos would ensue.”

Di Yun asked: “What happened exactly?”

Yan Daping said: “That night, the three of us slept in the same room. The next morning, Wan Zhenshan shouted loudly, ‘Where is the sword manual? Where is the sword manual?’ I was startled and woke up. I saw that the iron chest placed in the drawer had been pulled open, and the manual inside disappeared without a trace. The three of us were completely startled and searched



mindlessly, but how could we find it? This matter was extremely strange; the window inside the room was locked from the inside and was never moved, so the manual was definitely not stolen by an outsider. If it was not the doing of Brother Wan, then it must be Brother Qi."

"If that is true, why would he not open the window to make it look like an outsider did it?" reasoned Di Yun.

Yan Daping sighed. "The three of us are linked together by an iron chain. It is possible to take the case from the drawer, but the chain does not extend long enough to reach the window."

Di Yun said: "If that is so, what did you do next?"

Yan Daping replied: "It was not easy for us to get the sword manual, of course we would not let this matter rest. The three of us blamed each other for responsibility, but after a huge argument it was still inconclusive without evidence, so we could do nothing but go our separate ways..."

Di Yun said: "There is something I still don't understand, I ask for your guidance. Since your teacher possesses such a sword manual, he should have passed it on to his disciples a long time ago. Would he actually take it with him to his grave? Is that why you had to take strike first? Is that why you had to take his life?"

Yan Daping said: "My teacher... my teacher, ai, he... he is really muddled. He firmly believed that the three of us were malicious schemers, so he never passed the sword manual to us. When we saw that he was looking for an alternate successor, and even went as far as to pass on our clan's sword manual to an outsider, the three of us could not bear it any longer, hence... hence we took action."

Di Yun asked: "So that's how it is. How did you determine that Brother Qi was the one who took the manual?"

Yan Daping explained: "At first I suspected Wan Zhenshan because he was the first one to shout and declare thievery, so he was most suspicious. I secretly tailed him for some time and realized that he was not the one, because he was also following Brother Qi. If Brother Wan was the one who took the manual, he would not need to tail someone else, he would find a desolate place somewhere deep in the mountains to practice it. However, every time I tailed him I saw that he gnashed his teeth with an extremely impatient and loathsome expression, hence I changed my target and followed Qi Zhangfa."

Di Yun asked: "Did you find any clues?"

Yan Daping shook his head. "Qi Zhangfa is much too sophisticated, he did not leave any clues at all. I once watched his disciple and his daughter practise martial arts. He intentionally played dumb and changed the mnemonics of his Tang Poem Swordplay into a nonsensical mess. It really made me laugh my teeth out. But the more he pretended to be dumb, the more I suspected him. I followed him for three years, but he never revealed any evidence. Once he left home, I secretly went into his cottage to search. But there was no sword manual, it was difficult to even find a common book. Hmph, he is really crafty. Impressive!"

Di Yun asked: "What did you do next?"

Yan Daping said: “After that, Wan Zhenshan suddenly wanted to celebrate his birthday, and sent one of his disciples to invite Qi Zhangfa over to Jingzhou. Obviously, the birthday banquet was a scheme to test his martial brother. Qi Zhangfa brought his daughter and his foolish disciple called Di Yun or something together with him to Jingzhou. After the banquet, Di Yun fought with the eight disciples of the Wan clan and revealed remarkable sword stances which aroused Wan Zhenshan’s suspicions... benefactor, did you say something?”

Di Yun shook his head.

Yan Daping continued: “Thereafter, Wan Zhenshan brought Qi Zhangfa over to his study room to discuss. The two of them got into a heated argument and completely flipped faces. Qi Zhangfa attacked first and wounded Wan Zhenshan. After that he disappeared without a trace. It is strange, extremely strange.”

“What is so strange about it?” asked Di Yun.

“Qi Zhangfa disappeared without a trace, never to be heard from again. When Qi Zhangfa went to Jingzhou, he would definitely not carry the sword manual with him. He must have hid it in an extremely secluded place. Originally I thought that after he wounded Wan Zhenshan he would return for the manual that same night and then escape to a faraway place. So as soon as the incident occurred, I prepared a fast horse and arrived before he did. I wanted to see where he hid the manual before I made my move. However, I waited for a very long time but he never showed up. After a few years, I figured that he would never come back, so I no longer played nice with him. I turned his cottage upside down and began digging for the manual. However, all my efforts were in vain, I did not find anything at all. If not for benefactor, I surnamed Yan would have lost my life today. Heh, my Brother Wan is really a ruthless person!”

“According to you, where do you think your Brother Qi is now?” asked Di Yun.

Yan Daping shook his head. “I really don’t have a clue. Although the web of Heaven has many openings, the way of Heaven is fair, the guilty will not escape. Perhaps he contrived a sickness, or maybe he got into an accident and was eaten by a wild animal.”

Di Yun saw that his face was full of delight, as if to rejoice at the thought of his teacher’s misfortune. He became extremely angry, but upon thinking that his teacher was indeed without a trace all these years, it was actually likely that he was no longer in this world. He stood up and said: “Thank you for being honest with me. I have to take my leave now.”

Yan Daping respectfully greeted him three times and said: “I, Yan Daping, will never forget benefactor’s kindness.”

Di Yun said: “Such a small matter you need not take to heart. Besides... besides... you once... you should stay here to tend your wounds, Wan Zhenshan will never find you here. You don’t have to worry.”

Yan Daping laughed. “He’s probably as hasty as an ant on a frying pan, he will never find me.”

Di Yun asked: “Why is that?”

Yan Daping smiled. "My poisonous scorpion wounded his son's hand. He needs to apply the medicine ten times in order to completely purge the poison. He only applied it once, what use is that?"

Di Yun was taken aback. "So Wan Gui will lose his life?"

Yan Daping appeared complacent. "The poison of a mottling scorpion is no small matter. The cleverness lies in the fact that Wan Gui will not die easily. He will cry and moan for a full month before the deal is sealed. Haha, excellent! Excellent!"

Di Yun said: "If it takes him one month to die, then he need not worry. He can find a skilled physician to cure his poison."

Yan Daping said: "Benefactor does not understand. This poisonous scorpion was bred by me and was fed various antidotes since it was small. The scorpion understands the medical nature of various antidotes, so ordinary medicine will not be of any use. Even if he finds a very skilled physician, he would use the poison of various insects to treat the wound, what use is that? There is only one antidote that the scorpion has never eaten before, and that is the only one that can be used. Besides me, there is no second person in this world who knows the formula to produce such an antidote. Haha! Haha!"

Di Yun raised his eyebrows and thought: "This person can actually be so malicious, it is scary! It's possible that next time I will fall victim to his scorpion. Brother Ding always said that when wandering the realm, one should not harbour malicious intents, but one must be wary of others' malicious intents. It is best that I ask him to give me the antidote just in case." Then he declared: "That bottle of medicine, give it to me!"

Yan Daping said: "Of course! Of course!" He could not help but ask, "May I ask why benefactor wants the antidote?"

Di Yun said: "Your scorpion is extremely lethal. If I am not careful I may be bitten as well. It is best that I have a bottle of medicine just in case."

Yan Daping felt embarrassed and laughed: "Benefactor saved my life, why would I ever harm you? Benefactor is too skeptical."

Di Yun extended his hand forward and said: "I must have it just in case."

Yan Daping said, "Yes! Yes!" and at once took out the medicine and handed it over.

Di Yun descended the peak and went inside the house to take a look. The various villagers in the house had long disappeared. The housekeeper and foreman were nowhere to be seen. There was not a single person to be found.

Di Yun thought: "Teacher is dead, martial sister is married, I will never return here again."

He left the house and followed the creek to the northwest direction. After walking several hundred feet, he turned to look at the sun rising from the east, shining on the various poplar and locust trees in front of the house, the creek too illuminated flashes of light. He had seen such a scene many times

in his youth. He could not help but mutter to himself, "From now on, I will never see this place again."

He gently felt the package on his bosom and thought: "In front of me there is still one task I have to fulfill: I must bring Brother Ding's ashes together with Lady Ling. I will have to make a visit to Jingzhou. That little scoundrel Wan Gui has caused me so much suffering. Fortunately, an evil person will meet a tragic end, I do not need to personally take revenge. Yan Daping said that he will have to suffer an entire month before he dies, but who knows if that will happen or not. If he manages to find a skilled physician to cure his poison, then I will personally supplement his body with another strike and take his pathetic life."

Ever since he seeing the battle between Wan Zhenshan and Yan Daping last night, he became confident in his own skills.

## Chapter 10 – The Tang Poem Anthology



*Di Yun turned his head and laughed heartily. "I was the one who saved him! Haha! Haha! This must be some kind of joke. Is there anyone in this world who is more foolish than me?" Amidst his laughter, two streams of tears flowed down his cheeks.*

Jingzhou was not very far from Xiangxi. After several days of travel, Di Yun arrived at Jingzhou. He had travelled this path once before with his teacher and martial sister. The river creek was the same. The path was also the same. That year when he traversed this path, the journey was filled with Qi Fang's cheerful laughter. This time, when he went from Maxi to Jingzhou, there was not a single sound of laughter. Of course, people did laugh, only that Di Yun didn't hear it.

When Di Yun reached the outskirts of the city, he inquired and found out that Ling Tuisi was still the prefectural magistrate. Di Yun smeared dirt across his face to conceal his identity when he went in the city.

"I need to see for myself how much Wan Gui is suffering. I wonder if he has recovered? It could be that he is still in Hunan treating his injuries and hasn't returned."

Di Yun made his way to the Wan residence. From afar, he saw Shen Cheng rush out the front door looking extremely urgent. He thought: "If Shen Cheng is here, Wan Gui is probably here as well. When night comes, I will go in and take a look." Thereafter, he made his way to the abandoned garden.

The abandoned garden was not far away from the Wan residence. The day Ding Dian died and Zhou Qi, Geng Tianba, and Ma Daming were killed, all happened in this abandoned garden. Being in this garden made him reminiscence these events. The grass was grown tall as before, and there was rubble and debris everywhere. He made his way beside a plum tree and felt the various depressions and bumps of the tree. "That day, Ding Dian passed away beside this very tree. This plum tree still looks the same, nothing has changed, but Ding Dian has become a pile of ashes..."

Thereafter, he sat below the plum tree and slept until the second watch. Then he produced some food from his bosom and ate it. When the time came, he left the abandoned garden and made his way to the Wan residence. He leapt over the wall to get in. When he reached the garden, he could not help but feel a sense of bitterness in his heart. "That day when I suffered injuries I hid in this firewood room. Not only did my martial sister not save me, she was even heartless enough to tell her husband to come kill me." As he was about to continue walking, he suddenly saw three sources of fire light up next to the river.

Di Yun hid behind a tree and looked toward the direction of the light. He saw that the three sources of light were actually three incense sticks lit by an incense burner. The incense burner was placed on a small table. In front of the table, two people were kowtowing to Heaven. When they got up, Di Yun saw clearly who they were. One of them was Qi Fang, the other was her daughter, Water Spinach.

He heard Qi Fang pray softly, "For the first incense stick, I pray that Heaven will bless and protect my husband from suffering, and to purge the toxic from his body so he no longer suffers from the pain of scorpion poison. Water Spinach, speak up, tell Heaven that you wish your papa will recover."

The little girl said: "Okay mama. I ask that Bodhisattva blesses my father and alleviates his suffering so he no longer cries."

Although Di Yun was not very close, he heard all the words very clearly. Upon hearing that Wan Gui was suffering so much, he naturally rejoiced at his misfortune, but he also resented how affectionate Qi Fang was to her husband.

He heard Qi Fang say, "For the second incense stick, I pray that Heaven will bless and protect my father. I hope that my father will be free of disasters and calamities. I hope that my father will return soon. Water Spinach, tell Bodhisattva you wish your grandpa will live a prosperous life."

The little girl said: "Right. Grandpa, please return soon. Why haven't you returned?"

Qi Fang said: "Ask Bodhisattva to bless and protect your grandfather."

The little girl said: "I ask that Bodhisattva bless and protect my grandpa. Please bless and protect my papa and grandpa." She had never seen Qi Zhangfa before. When Qi Fang asked for her prayers, she naturally only considered her father and her paternal grandfather."

Qi Fang paused for a moment before she said: "For the third incense stick, I pray that Heaven will bless and protect him. I hope that everything goes well for him, and that he will soon find someone he truly loves and start a happy family..." As she said up to this point, her voice was filled with sobs. She raised her sleeves to wipe her tears.

The little girl said: "Mama, you are thinking of uncle again."

Qi Fang said: "Tell Heaven you wish Water Spinach uncle will be safe and sound..."

When Di Yun heard the prayers of her third incense stick, he was perplexed. "Who is she praying for?" But when he heard her say "Water Spinach uncle", a buzz went through his ears as he thought: "She's talking about me? She's really talking about me?"

The little girl said: "Mama really misses Water Spinach uncle. I pray that Bodhisattva will bless uncle with a great fortune so he will buy a big doll for me. He is Water Spinach, I am also Water Spinach. Mama, where is Water Spinach uncle? Why has he not returned?"

Qi Fang said: "Uncle Water Spinach is in a very faraway place. Your uncle abandoned your mama, your mama misses him dearly..." As she said up to this point, she carried her daughter back into the house.

Di Yun made his way in front of the incense burner. Watching the three incense sticks glisten in the dark, he became lost in thought.

He stood motionless in front of the three sticks. The sticks had burnt out into ashes, yet he still did not move.

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The next morning, Di Yun left the garden and began wandering aimlessly around Jingzhou. All of a sudden, he heard some banging sounds and saw in front of him a physician selling medicine on the street. Di Yun decided that he wanted to personally see how badly Wan Gui was suffering, so he took out ten taels of silver and bought the physician's clothes, medicine box, and fucheng<sup>1</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> A fucheng (虎撑) is a pole with an iron hoop that emits small jingling sounds. It's a symbol that you're a physician.

physician was surprised, for he knew that all of his items were not worth more than three or four taels of silver. He was more than delighted to sell everything to him.

Di Yun returned to the abandoned garden and put on the physician's attire. He took out some herbs from the box and smeared it on his face, he smeared especially much right under his left eye. He was changed beyond recognition. Then he began to shake his fucheng and made his way to the Wan residence.

When he neared the entrance, he shook the fucheng very heavily and walked close to the entrance and shouted with a very coarse voice, "I specialize in curing extremely difficult diseases, illnesses and nameless poisons. Insect and snake bites can be cured immediately!"

He walked back and forth for three orbits before someone came out urgently from the front door, waving, "Hey, physician, come over here."

Di Yun recognized that this was one of the Wan clan disciples. It was actually the one who sliced off his five fingers that year, Wu Kan. But Di Yun had completely disguised his appearance so he could not be recognized. Di Yun was afraid that his voice would be recognized, so he slowly trotted over and lowered his voice even further. "What do you have to ask of me? Have you contracted any strange illnesses or nameless poisons?"

Wu Kan spat out in disgust. "Does it look like I have contracted a poison? I ask you now, are you capable of curing scorpion bites?"

Di Yun said: "The poisons of green bamboo snakes, golden feet snakes, and iron spade snakes, all of the most poisons of the most deadly snakes under heaven, I can cure. Haha, what is a mere scorpion to me?"

Wu Kan said: "Don't be so confident. This is not an ordinary scorpion. Even a very famous Jingzhou physician shook his head when he saw it, how can you do better?"

Di Yun creased his eyebrows and said: "Is it really that deadly? The most poisonous scorpions in this world are merely gray haired scorpions, black and white scorpions, golden scorpions, pocked head scorpions, red tailed scorpions, white leg scorpions..." He spewed a bunch of nonsense and named 20 scorpions before continuing: "Every scorpion has a different kind of poison, and each has its own way of treatment. Even a famous physician may not necessarily be skilled; he may not be fully knowledgeable."

Wu Kan saw that this person's appearance was ugly and his clothes were shagged. Although this person was capable of naming many types of scorpions, it sounded like a bunch of inarticulately stuttered nonsense. He figured that this person was likely not very skilled at all, and said: "Very well then, go in and have a look. I will just pretend it's a dead horse being treated like a live horse." Di Yun nodded his head and followed him inside the mansion.

Wu Kan raised his head and shouted: "Third martial sister-in-law, there is a grass head physician here. He claims that he can cure a scorpion's poison. Should we let him take a look at martial brother?"



With an “ah!” the window opened. Qi Fang stuck her head outside the window and said: “Yes, please! Thank you, Brother Wu. Your martial brother is suffering even more today. Please bring the physician upstairs.”

Wu Kan said to Di Yun, “Go on ahead then.” He did not go up himself.

Qi Fang said: “Brother Wu, please go up as well so you can help keep an eye.”

Wu Kan complied and went upstairs.

When Di Yun went upstairs, he saw the center by the window was placed a very large desk. On top of the desk was placed a brush and blotting paper with about a dozen books. There was also a half-sewn child’s garment. Qi Fang came out from the inner room to welcome him. She was not wearing any cosmetics and looked rather wan and sallow. Di Yun glanced at her once and did not look again. He was afraid that she would recognize him and quietly followed her into the room.

Inside the room, a person slept on a large bed, moaning in pain. It was Wan Gui. His daughter sat on a small stool beside him, gently massaging her father’s legs. When she saw Di Yun’s filthy and strange appearance, she became startled and hurriedly cowered behind her mother.

Wu Kan said: “My martial brother was bitten by a poisonous scorpion. The poison in his body will not purge. There seems to be a serious problem.”

Di Yun mumbled: “Mm, is that so?” Earlier when he spoke to Wu Kan outside he was cool and collected, but now that he saw Qi Fang, his heart was bouncing around his chest, both his cheeks felt warm, and his lips and tongue felt dry. He could not even speak properly. He went to the bed and gently patted Wan Gui’s shoulder.

Wan Gui slowly got up. When he saw Di Yun’s appearance, he became slightly startled. Qi Fang said: “San’ge<sup>2</sup>, this is the physician that Brother Wu found for you, he... he may have some kind of miraculous antidote to treat your poison.” The way she said these words, it was clear that she had no confidence in this physician.

Di Yun did not say a word. He looked at Wan Gui’s swollen hand and saw that there were round black spots, it was extremely repulsive. He spoke in a coarse voice, “This poison was contracted from a mottling scorpion from Xiangxi. We do not have this type of scorpion in Hubei!”

Qi Fang and Wu Kan both said: “Right, this wound was indeed contracted from Xiangxi in Hunan.” Qi Fang continued: “Mister, since you are able to determine the type of poison just by looking at it, are you able to cure it?” Her voice was full of hope.

Di Yun counted on his fingers and said: “He was bitten at night, hmm, it has now been seven days and seven nights.”

Qi Fang glanced at Wu Kan then said: “Mister really has supernatural accuracy. He was indeed bitten at night, and it really has been seven days and seven nights.”

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<sup>2</sup> Qi Fang calls him “San’ge” which means “third brother” because Wan Gui is Wan Zhenshan’s third disciple.

Di Yun continued: “Did this gentleman turn his hand over to crush the scorpion? If he did not do this, there would be a cure for him. But because he crushed the scorpion with his hand, its poison has completely forced itself into his hand. It is useless to help him now.”

When Qi Fang heard that this physician was even accurate enough to determine the number of days, she thought there really was a cure and her face was full of delight. But upon hearing this, she felt anxious. “Mister has spoken very clearly. But I ask that you please save his life at any cost.”

The whole point of Di Yun disguising himself as a physician was to enter the Wan residence so he could personally see how pathetically Wan Gui was suffering. He wanted to see him moaning and groaning in his pitiful state in order to relieve the accumulated anger in his heart. He really had no intention to save his life at all. But since he was small he had listened to Qi Fang’s every word, and never once did he disobey her. Now when he heard her desperate plea, his heart softened and he opened up the medicine box intending to take out the antidote he took from Yan Daping. But upon further consideration he thought: “This Wan Gui has caused me so much suffering, he even took my martial sister away from me. I am already being extremely kind for not killing him myself. How could I go so far as to save him?” He shook his head and said: “It is not that I don’t want to save him, it’s just that after so many days, the poison has slowly made its way to his brain. There is nothing that I can do now.”

Qi Fang hung her head down and began to cry. She pulled her daughter beside her and said: “Water Spinach my dear, kowtow to this uncle and beseech him to rescue your papa.”

Di Yun hurriedly shook his hand and said, “Please, there is no need...” But the little girl was very obedient and always listened to her mother’s words. She also knew that her father was gravely injured so she felt very anxious. At once she knelt down and gave him a resounding kowtow. As Di Yun had lost the five fingers on his right hand, he hid it inside his sleeve the entire time. Instead he extended his left hand and brought the girl up. When he saw the little girl’s full body, he saw a golden locket hung on her neck. On the gold piece was inscribed the words “Virtuous Appearance, Double Luxuriance”.

When Di Yun saw this, he became confused. He recalled the day he fainted in the firewood room. When he later woke up on a boat in the middle of the Yangtze, there were various gold and silver jewelleries beside him. One of them was a little girl’s locket which also inscribed these four exact words. Could it be...?

He only looked once and did not dare to look again. His thoughts were all over the place. Eventually he cleared his mind and collected his thoughts. “I fainted in the firewood room in the Wan residence. It must have been martial sister who saved me, there can be no other person. In the past I thought she intentionally harmed me, but last night... last night she prayed to Heaven and revealed her thoughts. She still cares about me very much. There is no way she hurt me that day. Could it be... could it be that Heaven has eyes, after all the suffering that I’ve been through, can I really reunite with my martial sister?”

When he thought of the word “reunite” his heart began to bounce wildly. He tilted his head sideways to look at Qi Fang and saw that her face was full of worry and troubles, staring intensely at Wan Gui, her eyes showing great tenderness and affection.

When Di Yun saw her expression his heart came to a halt, he felt an ice-cold sensation on his back. He remembered very clearly the events that happened that day, how he fought with the eight disciples of the Wan clan, how he was completely humiliated by them, how his martial sister mended his garment back together with the same brimming tenderness in her eyes. But now her eyes were all for her husband, it was no longer for him.

"If I don't give him the antidote, no one can blame me. I can wait for Wan Gui to die an excruciating death and then leave with her at night, who can stop me? I don't care about the past, we... we can become man and wife. I will take her daughter along with me. Ai, this is not right. No! Martial sister has been the lady of the house all these years and lived a luxurious life, how can she go back to farming with me? Besides, I am ugly and I don't even know past a few hundred words and my hand is crippled, how do I deserve to be with her? How would she be willing to leave with me?" He felt very ashamed of his own inferiority and became depressed.

How would Qi Fang know that this physician would have so many thoughts in mind? She could do no more but stare at him intensely, hoping that he would utter the words "There is a cure!"

Wan Gui groaned in excruciating pain. At this point the poison had already made its way to the joint of his arm, his entire arm and palm was swollen and the pain was unbearable.

Qi Fang waited for a very long time but Di Yun did not respond. She pleaded: "Mister, please give it a try. Even if you can only... only lessen his suffering, then that is fine, we won't fault you." The intent was that even if Wan Gui could not keep his life, she would still hope that the physician can lessen his pain. She did not want her husband to die in such an anguishing way.

Di Yun interjected and his mind came back to the moment. In a split second his mind was completely empty, completely disheartened. He wished he could just die right now. He wholeheartedly cared for his martial sister, yet she married his arch nemesis and even went as far as to plea him to rescue his own enemy. "I would rather be in Wan Gui's position. I would rather suffer endless pain and misery. If I can have martial sister care for me this much, even if I only have a few days left to live, what does it matter?" He opened the medicine box and took out Yan Daping's antidote bottle. He turned over the bottle and let the black powder fall on the back of Wan Gui's hand.

Wu Kan exclaimed: "Ah... it... it is this antidote, he... he can be cured!"

Di Yun heard that there was a hidden meaning in his words. The words "he can be cured" should have been uttered with extreme happiness, yet his voice seemed to suggest a hint of disappointment and even some resentment. Di Yun felt it was extremely strange. He turned his head slightly to look at Wu Kan and saw that his expression was full of cruelty and viciousness. Di Yun was extremely perplexed. But then he thought that there was not a single good person amongst the eight disciples. If Wan Zhenshan and Yan Daping were willing to kill each other, how strange would it be if Wu Kan and Wan Gui weren't on good terms? However, why would he waste time to find someone to cure him?

Not long after the medicine was applied, a lot of black blood began to seep out of the wound on his hand. His suffering was gradually reduced and said: "Thank you, your antidote is really effective."

Qi Fang was extremely pleased and fetched a copper bowl to receive the blood. The blood constantly dripped into the bowl. Qi Fang thanked Di Yun repeatedly.

Wu Kan said: “Martial sister-in-law, has little brother not done a good service?”

Qi Fang said: “Right, I must also thank Brother Wu.”

Wu Kan smiled. “Just saying thanks is not enough!”

Qi Fang ignored him and asked Di Yun: “What is your surname? We must thank you greatly with a gift.”

Di Yun shook his head. “No need to thank me. The medicine needs to be applied ten times to completely cure the poison.” His heart felt very sour, he thought everything in the world was miserable. “I will give the rest to you!” He handed over the bottle.

Qi Fang did not expect that the matter would end so simply. She did not dare to accept the antidote. “We will buy it from you, may I ask how much it is?”

Di Yun shook his head. “There is no need to pay.”

Qi Fang was extremely pleased. She received the bottle with both hands and bowed respectfully, offering her most heartfelt gratitude. “Mister is really an honourable person, I really do not know how to thank you. Brother Wu, please see him out of here.”

Di Yun said: “There is no need. I will leave now.”

Qi Fang said: “No, Mister is our saviour yet we have no good way to repay you. At the very least we should treat you to a cup of wine. Mister, please don’t leave yet!”

As soon the words “please don’t leave yet!” made its way to Di Yun’s ear, his heart softened. He thought: “Looks like I won’t be able to take my revenge. After burying Brother Ding, I will never return to Jingzhou again, nor will I ever see martial sister again. If she wants to treat me to a cup of wine, it will give me a chance to look at her a few more times, nothing bad could come out of that.”

He nodded his head.

The banquet was prepared in a little guest room downstairs. Di Yun sat on the central seat of honour while Wu Kan sat opposite of him. Qi Fang repeatedly thanked the physician for his efforts and prepared the meal herself. It appeared as if everyone else in the Wan residence was not at home; the other disciples did not attend this banquet.

Qi Fang respectfully treated Di Yun to three cups of wine. Di Yun accepted all three cups. His heart became sour and his eyes started to become teary. He knew he could not hold his feelings much longer, if he were to stay any longer he would reveal himself. At once he got up and said: “I have had enough wine, it is time for me to take my leave. I will never come back again!”

Qi Fang was extremely perplexed by his choice of words, but felt that this physician was weird to begin with, so she did not take it to heart. “We will never be able to thank Mister for what he has

done. Here are 100 taels of silver for mister to buy wine during his travels." As she said this she passed on a bag full of silver with both hands.

Di Yun turned his head and laughed heartily. "I was the one who saved him! Haha! Haha! This must be some kind of joke. Is there anyone in this world who is more foolish than me?" Amidst his laughter, two streams of tears flowed down his cheeks.

Qi Fang and Wu Kan were both shocked at his expression. The little girl said: "Uncle don't cry! Uncle don't cry!"

Di Yun became startled. He was afraid that he would reveal his identity, so he did not dare to talk to Qi Fang anymore. He thought: "From now on, I will never see you again." He felt the poetry that he got from the cave in Yuanling on his bosom and put his sleeve on the chair, not daring to look at Qi Fang again. He made his way downstairs without once turning back to look at her.

Qi Fang said: "Brother Wu, please escort this Mister on his way out."

Wu Kan said, "Certainly," and followed through.

Qi Fang held the bag of silver in her hands, her heart thumping anxiously. She thought: "Who is this person? How come this person's smile looks so much like his? Ai, what is wrong with me? San'ge is in pain yet my heart is all over the place, I am still thinking of him..." She placed the bag of silver on the table and sat on the chair.

She sat on the chair that Di Yun sat on earlier. She felt there was something on this chair and stood up right away. She saw an old yellow book. On the cover were the three words "Tang Poem Anthology".

She gasped slightly and picked up the book. She casually opened the book and a shoe fell out, it was the cut out that she made that year back in her hometown in Xiangxi. At this point her mouth was wide open in disbelief, both hands trembled. She turned another several pages and saw a cut out of a pair of butterflies. She remembered the events that year when she sat next to Di Yun in the cave and cut out these butterflies, all of these thoughts entered her mind at once. She could not help but gasp in disbelief and thought: "Where did this... this book come from? Who brought it here? Could it be the physician?"

The little girl saw her mother's expression change and became startled. "Mama, what are you doing?"

Qi Fang stared blankly. She put the book in her bosom and rushed downstairs. She rushed outside and continued pursuit. Ever since she had married into the Wan family, she had been very refined and educated, but now she was running around the halls like a wild woman, something she had never done before. The various servants of the mansion saw their lady exert her lightness martial arts and went past several courtyards, rushing her way out. They were astonished.

Qi Fang made her way to the lobby and saw Wu Kan enter from outside. She hurriedly said: "Where is the physician?"

Wu Kan said: “That person is really strange, he did not say a word and just left. Third martial sister-in-law, why are you looking for him? Has something happened to martial brother?”

Qi Fang said, “No!” and rushed outside the front door. She looked all around but did not see any trace of the physician.

She stood motionless at the front door for a long time. She took the book out of her bosom and turned through the pages. Every time she saw the various figures and cut outs that she made in her youth, her thoughts rushed forth like ocean waves. She could not help but become teary.

She thought: “How can I be so foolish? Father-in-law and San’ge have recently visited Uncle Yan in Xiangxi. They may have unexpectedly ventured into the cave and took the book. That must be it. How could that physician be in any way related to this book?” But then she thought: “No! How could there be such a coincidence? That cave is extremely remote, even my father doesn’t know about it. In this world, besides me, only my martial brother knows about it. How could father-in-law and San’ge possibly find it? They only went to find Uncle Yan, why would they go in a cave? Just now when I set up the banquet I remember cleaning all the seats, how could there be a book there? If the physician was not the one who brought the book, then how did it end up there?”

She was in a haze of doubts and suspicions. She went back inside and saw that Wan Gui looked a lot better after applying the medicine. She held the book tightly in her hands and wanted to ask her husband, but thought: “I can’t be impulsive, what if that physician is really...”

Wan Gui said: “Fang’mei, that physician really is my benefactor. You must reward him gracefully.”

Qi Fang said: “Right, I gave him 100 taels of silver, but he would not accept it. He is really a strange person. That antidote... where is that antidote? Did you put it away?” After the physician gave her the antidote, she placed it on the table next to the bed, but now it was nowhere to be seen.

Wan Gui said: “I did not. Is it not on the table?”

Qi Fang searched the table, bed, vanity table, chairs, cabinets, under the bed, and other various places, but the antidote was nowhere to be found. She felt anxious. “Could it be that I unconsciously dropped it on the ground when I rushed outside? No, I remember very clearly that I placed it on the table, right beside the bowl.”

Wan Gui became anxious too. “You... you must find it, how can it disappear? Before I took a nap, I remember very clearly the bottle was placed on the table.”

When he said this, Qi Fang became even more anxious. She rushed out of the room and asked her daughter, “Just now when mama went outside, did anyone come in this room?”

The little girl said: “Uncle Wu came upstairs. He saw that papa was asleep so he left!”

Qi Fang took a very deep breath. She knew there was something wrong, but she did not want to worry her sick husband. “Water Spinach, stay with your papa. Tell him that mama went to find the physician to buy another bottle of medicine for papa.”

The little girl nodded. “Mama, come back soon.”

Qi Fang gathered her thoughts and opened the desk drawer. She took out a dagger and concealed it. Then she went downstairs. She thought: "Wu Kan must have saw that I was not around so he harboured malicious intentions. But he was the one who invited the physician, could it be that the two of them have colluded and planned some sort of crafty scheme? Otherwise, how could the bottle of antidote disappear after the physician left?"

She pondered deeply as she made her way to the garden. She reached the cloister and saw that Wu Kan was leaning against the railing, looking at the goldfish in the pond. Qi Fang said: "Brother Wu, you are here alone?"

Wu Kan turned around, a smile stretched across his whole face. "I was wondering who it is. So it is sister-in-law. You should be upstairs with martial brother, what brings you here?"

Qi Fang sighed. "Ai, I feel very bored staying beside this sick man all day. Your martial brother is in great pain and his temperament has changed for the worse. If I do not come outside to get some fresh air and find someone to talk to, I will suffocate."

Wu Kan was very surprised to hear this. He laughed. "Martial brother is never content; he is like a snake trying to swallow an elephant. He has such a flowery and jade-like beauty to accompany him, yet he is throwing temper tantrums. He is truly hard a hard person to please."

Qi Fang walked beside her and too leaned against the railing. She looked at the pond full of goldfish and said: "Your martial sister-in-law is an old woman, how can she be said to be flowery or jade-like? I'm afraid other people would take that as a joke."

Wu Kan said: "What? Where? When sister-in-law was a maiden she had the elegance of a maiden, now that she is the lady of the house she has the charm of a lady. Like everyone says, the most beautiful and elegant flower lies in the Wan family."

Qi Fang smirked and turned around and reached out with her hands. "Hand it over!"

Wu Kan laughed. "Hand what over?"

Qi Fang said: "The antidote!"

Wu Kan shook his head. "What antidote? The one used to treat Brother Wan's injuries?"

Qi Fang said: "Yes, you were the one who took it."

Wu Kan laughed craftily. "I was the one who found the physician. I was the one who found the antidote. Brother Wan has already applied it once, he will be relieved of pain for several days."

Qi Fang said: "The physician said that it needs to be applied ten times."

Wu Kan shook his head. "I repent too early. I repent too early."

Qi Fang said: "What are you repenting for?"

Wu Kan said: “When I saw the filthy appearance of that physician no different from a beggar, I thought he was incapable. The only reason I brought him upstairs was so that I could find a reason to see you one more time. I did not expect that there would actually be a cure for this poison. This is completely against my original intent.”

Qi Fang was extremely angry when she heard this. However the antidote was on this person’s hands, so she would have to find a way to take it back before settling the score. At once she calmed herself and smiled. “According to what you said, you want your martial brother to personally thank you, then you will hand over the antidote?”

Wu Kan sighed. “Martial brother has had the benefit of your romance for so many years. He should have died a long time ago.”

Qi Fang’s face changed colours. She bit her lips and did not speak out. Wu Kan continued: “That year when you went to Jingzhou, out of us eight martial siblings, which one of us was not completely infatuated by your appearance? That little fool Di Yun followed you the entire day, the eight of us could do no more than repress our anger. We came up with a plan to beat him to a pulp.”

Qi Fang said: “So it turns out that the reason you hurt my martial brother is all because of me!”

Wu Kan laughed. “Everyone said this, but naturally the reasoning was different. We said how he meddled in our affairs to fight the bandit Lu Tong, making the disciples of the Wan clan lose face. But in fact, it was all because of you! The way you mended his clothes, the way you spoke to him so intimately, the way you treated him so affectionately, when the eight of us saw this, we were completely enraged. Which one of us did not drink until all of our teeth became sour?”

Qi Fang was startled. She thought: “Could it be that I was the cause of all this? San’ge, San’ge, why did you never tell me?” She pretended not to care and laughed. “Brother Wu, you really know how to tell a joke. Back then I was a little girl from the countryside and was nothing more than a rustic, my appearance must have been completely laughable. How could I be so worthy?”

Wu Kan said: “No! Why would a true beauty like you need make up or gorgeous attire? If you did not cause the eight of us to lose our souls for you, then...” All of a sudden he shut his mouth and did not continue.

Qi Fang asked: “What is it?”

Wu Kan said: “We kept you in the Wan family. I surnamed Wu have contributed a lot to this cause. But sister-in-law, when you see me you don’t even smile, how can I not feel indignant?”

Qi Fang spat in contempt. “I stayed in the Wan family and married your martial brother because I wanted to. What does that have to do with you? You did nothing to convince me to do such a thing. What nonsense do you speak of?”

Wu Kan shook his head and laughed. “I... I did not contribute? You really do not understand.”

Qi Fang became even more fearful. She spoke softly, “Brother Wu, tell me what you contributed. Your martial sister-in-law I will definitely not forget your grace.”



Wu Kan shook his head. "Why should such an old matter be spoken of again? Even if you know it now, it won't make a difference. We should only speak of the future."

Qi Fang said: "Well then, if you don't want to talk about it that's fine. Give me the antidote. If anyone sees the two of us here, that won't be appropriate."

Wu Kan laughed. "In the day of light someone would see us, but not at night."

Qi Fang backed away one step, her face cold as frost. Her tone became very strict. "What are you talking about?"

Wu Kan laughed. "If you want to cure Brother Wan's injuries, that is not very hard. I will meet you inside the firewood room tonight on the third watch. If you satisfy my desires, I will let you use the antidote once."

Qi Fang clenched her teeth and scolded: "Dog thief, you actually dare to speak of such things! You have some nerve!"

Wu Kan remained calm and collected. "I have long thrown caution to the wind. This is called being willing to cut off flesh to pull the emperor off the horse. In what way does that little brat Wan Gui exceed I surnamed Wu? It is only that he is teacher's son, he was born to a good life. All of us contributed, yet he is the only one who gets to enjoy the results?"

Qi Fang has now heard several times now of how he spoke about contribution. She became really curious but did not dare to ask. "When father-in-law returns, I will report to him everything that's happened, let's see if he will not tear your skin off."

Wu Kan said: "I will stay here. As soon as teacher calls me, I will throw the bottle of antidote into the lotus pond to feed the goldfish. I have asked the physician, he told me that there is only one bottle, and it takes over a year to make another one." As he said this he took out the bottle from his bosom. He removed the stopper and extended his hand over the pond. All he had to do was tilt his hand slightly and the bottle would fall. Wan Gui's life would be lost just as easily.

Qi Fang spoke urgently. "Hey! Put away the antidote. We can talk this over."

Wu Kan laughed. "What is there to discuss? If you want to save your husband, you will listen to me."

Qi Fang said: "Even if you really treated me in the past, but... unless you tell me what happened, I won't care about you."

Wu Kan was delighted. He sealed the bottle and said: "So I just have to tell you the truth, then you will spend the night with me?"

Qi Fang said: "That will depend if you are lying or not. If you lie to me, what good is that?"

Wu Kan said: "I will speak nothing but the absolute truth. This plan was conceived by Brother Shen. Brother Zhou and Brother Bu pretended to be rapists and sneaked into Tao Hong's room to lure that fool Di Yun to save her. The various jewelleries that we found under his bed were placed there by me personally. If we did not execute such a crafty scheme, how could we keep you with us?"

Qi Fang went into a daze. Her vision became dark. What Wu Kan said felt like a sharp blade stabbing into her heart. She could do nothing but say, “I... I have faulted you, I have wronged you!” All along she did not understand why her martial brother, who had grown up with her and had a deeply affectionate relationship with her, would so easily fall for a woman he didn’t even know. Could it be that she was flirting with him? Could she have ingratiated and seduced him? Brother Di had always been a faithful person. Even if it was something as small as a piece of cake or a grain of sugar, he would not dare to take it from someone else. If someone were to give it to him, without his teacher’s permission, he would definitely not take it. How would he dare to take other people’s jewellery? Could it be that when he went to a rich family and saw all this jewellery, he became overcome with greed and desires for wealth?

This was something she did not understand all along. Although she eventually married Wan Gui, she cared for her martial brother all along. Fortunately, Wu Kan had finally untied the knot in her heart this entire time.

“I... I have wronged martial brother. I must find him, I must tell him I’m sorry! I... I should die in front of him!” She swayed her body and nearly fell over. She supported herself with the railing and said: “I don’t believe you. How could such a thing happen? You are lying to me.” Her voice was bitter and astringent.

Wu Kan said: “You don’t believe me? You don’t have to ask anyone else, just ask Tao Hong. She is in the memorial hall. After you ask her, you must not tell anyone. My martial brothers and I vowed that nobody is allowed to leak out this secret. If not for our meeting at the third watch, if not for you, my sister-in-law, how would I Wu Kan reveal this to you!”

Qi Fang screamed and rushed outside. She pushed open the back door of the garden and continued running away.

Her thoughts were all over the place. She continued running past several gardens before she regained her composure. She found a small worn out memorial hall in the northwest corner and pushed open the door to go inside.

She saw that the floor was covered by a thick layer of dust and the tables and chairs were broken. She thought: “How could the concubine of father-in-law, Tao Hong, live in such a place? Wu Kan is a deceiver, could it be that... that he lied to me for some evil purpose? I should leave right away.”

All of a sudden she heard the sound of slow footsteps treading on the floor, a woman came out from the inner hall. It was a middle-aged beggar lady, her head was low and her back was crooked. Her hair was messy and drooped over her face. And her clothes were filthy and ragged.

When this beggar lady saw someone was here, she was startled. At once she turned around to leave. As she made her way inside, she turned her head to take another look and saw very clearly that it was Qi Fang. She gasped in surprise, retracted two steps and kneeled down. “My lady, please don’t... don’t tell anyone that I am here.”

Qi Fang was perplexed. “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

The beggar lady said: "What... what? I... I..." When she said up to this point she immediately got up and rushed back to the inner hall.

She heard the sound of footsteps were urgent, the beggar lady escaped through the rear door. Qi Fang thought: "I wonder what's wrong with this lady, she was so scared when she saw me... oh! Now that I think about it, she must be Tao Hong!" As soon as she thought of this she hurriedly pursued her and rushed through the memorial hall. She stepped on debris and made her way to the rear exit, then she fetched the dagger from her waist and shouted: "Tao Hong! What are you being so secretive for?"

This beggar lady was indeed Tao Hong. When she heard Qi Fang yell out her name, she panicked. She turned and saw that Qi Fang was holding a sharp and shiny dagger in her hand and became even more afraid. Her knees trembled and she knelt down at once. In a trembling voice she said, "Lady, please... please spare me."

Qi Fang had only seen Tao Hong a few times before. After a while she never saw her again. Every time she saw her she would think of how Di Yun wanted to bundle up valuables and abscond with this lady, it felt like a stab in her heart. So she never cared to ask what happened to this lady. Even if someone were to bring up the topic, she would not listen, so as to prevent her heart from being traumatized further. But she did not expect that Tao Hong would hide in such a place. This memorial hall was not far away from the mansion, but ever since Qi Fang became the young lady of the house she was cautious in all matters, much different from back when she was a maiden in her hometown in Xiangxi, she would never dare to wander off away from home. A few times she saw the entrance to this memorial hall from outside, but she never once went inside.

Tao Hong had a dirty face and messy hair and looked very thin and pallid. Qi Fang had not seen her for only a few years, but it was as if she aged 20 years. Wu Kan told Qi Fang to go to the memorial hall to seek the truth from Tao Hong. Although she saw her face-to-face now, if Tao Hong had remained calm and collected, Qi Fang would not have recognized her.

Qi Fang hoisted the dagger on her hand and threatened: "Why are you hiding here? Tell me now."

Tao Hong said: "I... I don't know. My Lady, Master kicked me out of the house. He said that if he ever saw me in Jingzhou, he would kill me. But... but... I have nowhere to go, so I had to resort to begging for food around here. My Lady, apart from Jingzhou, there is no place that I know of. Where am I supposed to go? Please do a good deed, don't tell Master about this."

Qi Fang listened to her pitiful words and put the dagger away. "Why did father-in-law kick you out? How come I didn't know about this?"

Tao Hong spoke with teary eyes, "I don't know why Master suddenly stopped liking me. That incident regarding that man surnamed Di from Hunan, it was not my fault. Oh... I shouldn't speak of it."

Qi Fang said: "Very well then. If you won't speak, I will take you to see father-in-law." She reached for her lapel with her left hand. Qi Fang was naturally a clean person, Tao Hong's clothes were filthy and full of grease; when she grabbed her garment it was extremely slippery and unpleasant to touch. But she urgently wanted to know the truth behind Di Yun's unjust treatment. Even if this lady was ten times filthier she would still not care.

Tao Hong trembled and urgently said: “I will talk, I will talk. My Lady, what do you want me to say?”

Qi Fang said: “Di... Di... regarding the incident about the one surnamed Di, what is that all about? Why did you want to elope with him?”

Tao Hong was extremely startled and frightened by her question. Her eyes opened wide and she did not speak out.

Qi Fang fixed her gaze on Tao Hong and too felt frightened. In fact, what she felt was probably ten-fold greater. She did not dare to listen to Tao Hong speak the truth. If Tao Hong said that Di Yun really did want to elope with her and really did rape her, what happens then? The fact that Tao Hong did not speak out right away caused Qi Fang to turn deathly pale, and her heart skipped a beat.

Finally, Tao Hong said: “That... that wasn’t my fault. Young Master forced me to do this. He told me to hug tightly onto that countryman surnamed Di. He told me to frame him for trying to rape and elope with me. I told Master about this before. It is not that he doesn’t believe me, he only told me that I cannot speak of this to anyone. He also returned me my clothes and money. Yet... yet I did not say a word, but Master still kicked me out.”

Qi Fang felt gratefulness, broken-heartedness and pity. She thought: “Martial brother, it is all my fault. I should have known that you only cared about me all along. You have really suffered too much, you have suffered too much!” At this moment she did not hate Tao Hong, she was actually really grateful. She was happy that the tight knot in her heart was finally untied. She was even grateful to Wu Kan, it was he who spat out the truth, it was he who directed her to find Tao Hong.

Between feelings of grievance and desolation, she also felt a burst of agony and sweetness. Although she was married to Wan Gui, in her heart she loved Di Yun all along. No matter how unfaithful he was, no matter how shameless and despicable he was, even if he had a thousand faults and every possible kind of fickle, she only cared for him, she only longed for him, he was the one who Qi Fang cried and missed so dearly for.

All of a sudden, her various distresses and resentments turned into repentance and remorse. She thought: “If I had knew this since the beginning, even at the risk of being hacked to pieces, I would have rescued him from prison. He has suffered so much... he... what does he think of me?”

Tao Hong looked at Qi Fang’s expression and spoke in a trembling voice, “My Lady, thank you. Please let me go. I will leave Jingzhou and never come back.”

Qi Fang sighed. “Why did father-in-law kick you out? Was he afraid that I would find out the truth? Ai, today I have finally come to a resolution.” She let go of her hold on her sleeves. She wanted to give her some silver but she ran over here in such a hurry that she did not bring any with her.

When Tao Hong saw Qi Fang release her, her fear changed and she urgently hurried to leave, mumbling, “Master saw ghosts at night, he wanted to build a wall, can he fault me? It... it is not my assertion.”

Qi Fang caught up with her and asked: “What ghost? He’s building a wall?”

Tao Hong knew that she said something she shouldn't have, and urgently said: "Nothing, it's nothing. Master always sees ghosts at night, he builds a wall late in the depth of night."

Qi Fang heard that what she said seemed like a bunch of nonsensical drivel. She thought that it must be because she had suffered so much after being kicked out that she started to go crazy. Why would father-in-law build a wall in the middle of the night? She had never seen him build a wall before.

Tao Hong was afraid that she wouldn't believe her and said: "It is a fake wall, Master... Master wants to become a mason late at night. I talked to him before, but he got very angry at me and beat me to an inch of my life and kicked me out. He said that if he saw me again he would kill me..." She chattered garrulously as she walked away with a crooked back.

Qi Fang thought: "She could not even be ten years older than me, yet she has become like this. I wonder why father-in-law kicked her out? Speaking of seeing ghosts and building walls, this woman must be insane. Ai, because of a foolish girl, martial brother has suffered for a lifetime!"

As she thought up to this point, she could not help but become teary. Eventually she wailed loudly without restraints. She cried for a very long time leaning against a parasol tree. Eventually she calmed herself and slowly returned home. She avoided the garden and went in from the side door on the east and went upstairs.

When Wan Gui heard the sound of her footsteps, he urgently asked: "Fang'mei, have you found the antidote yet?"

Qi Fang went inside the room and saw Wan Gui sitting up and looking somewhat anxious. He put his wounded hand on the bedside, black blood seeping out the back of his hand. It took a while for the blood to finish seeping into copper bowl. The little girl was sleeping next to her father's legs on the bed.

When Qi Fang heard the words of Wu Kan and Tao Hong, originally she resented Wan Gui extremely, she hated him for using such a despicable method to set up Di Yun. But when she saw how pale and delicate he looked, their conjugal love of several years softened her heart. She thought: "After all, it is because San'ge loves me that he set up martial brother. Although the method he used was extremely treacherous and despicable and caused my martial brother endless suffering, he did it all because he loves me."

Wan Gui asked: "Have you bought the antidote yet?"

Qi Fang could not at that moment decide whether she wanted to inform her husband about Wu Kan's shameless words, she casually said, "I found the physician and gave him some silver for him to buy the ingredients to formulate the antidote."

Wan Gui breathed a sigh of relief, his heart immediately relaxed. He smiled: "Fang'mei, you saved my life."

Qi Fang forced a smile, she saw that the air of poisonous blood inside the washbowl was extremely sensitive to her nose, hence she switched to a new bowl to take in the blood and took away the copper bowl. She only walked two steps when the odour rushed right to her nose, she felt a bit dizzy and thought: "The scorpion poison is really powerful!" She quickened her pace out of the

room and placed the washbowl on the floor beside a table. She turned around and took out a handkerchief from her bosom to cover up her nose before throwing out the blood.

When she felt her bosom she also felt the Tang poem book she had with her. She was dumbfounded and her heart began to bounce around her chest. She took out the book and placed it on the table, turning it page by page. She remembered very clearly that day when she was checking on some old clothes, under a suitcase of old clothes she found this book. Her father's knowledge of words was incredibly limited, she did not know from where he got such a book. After she finished cutting up two embroideries she conveniently put it in the book. That afternoon she went with her martial brother to the cave and took the book with her and left it there ever since. How did it end up here? Was it Brother Di who told the physician to bring it over?

"That physician, could it be... could it be... the five fingers of his right hand were sliced off by Wu Kan. That physician... that physician... why? Why did he never... never take out his right hand?" As she thought up to this point, she remembered something. She recalled how the physician helped her daughter up, how he opened the medicine box and got the bottle of antidote, how he pulled out the cork and smeared the powder. She also recalled how he accepted her wine, and how he placed the cup of wine next to his lips, all these things were done using his left hand. Only at that time she did not really pay attention and did not notice.

"Could it be... he is martial brother! Why does he look so different?" Her heart was distracted and her thoughts were in turmoil, she could not hold back her grief and her tears dripped on the book on her hands.

As the tears dripped on the page, it also dripped on the two paper butterflies. It was 'Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai', they could not reunite until after death...

Wan Gui said from the other room, "Fang'mei, it is extremely stuffy in here. I want to go out for a walk." But Qi Fang was completely immersed in her thoughts and did not hear him. She thought: "That day he killed a butterfly and broke up a pair of butterflies. Is it that Heaven wants to punish him to have him suffer so much..."

All of a sudden, a voice beyond him cried out in disbelief. "That... that is... that is the Lian... Liancheng Manual!"

Qi Fang was startled. She turned her head and saw Wan Gui's delightful expression who excitedly said: "Fang'mei, where did you get this book from? Look, ah, so that's how it is, right, that's how it is!" He pressed both his hands on the "Tang Poem Anthology" and saw that the title of one of the pages was "Sacred Fruit Temple", its words revealed the number "33", the characters were a damp yellow from Qi Fang's tears.

Wan Gui was so happy that he lost all self-control. He shouted: "So that is the secret! The book must be wet for the words to appear! Excellent! Excellent! This is definitely the book. Water Spinach! Water Spinach!" He called out loudly and woke the little girl up. "Water Spinach! Go and find your grandpa, tell him that I have something urgent to say." The little girl agreed and went her way.

Wan Gui held the book tightly in his hands and forgot all about the pain. He said: "This must be it. Father said that the sword manual was actually a 'Tang Poem Anthology', how could this not be it?

No one could figure out the secret. You actually have to wet the pages in order for the secret to appear."

When he talked in this way, Qi Fang figured out over half of the truth. She thought: "So this is the 'Liancheng Manual' that father and father-in-law are looking for? So it is actually my father who had it, but I did not even realize it and used it to clip together my shoes? If father lost his book, why did he not look for it? He must have looked for it but could not find it. He must have thought that it was martial uncle who took it. Why did he not ask me? That is really strange!"

If this was Di Yun, he would not be baffled at all. He knew that Qi Zhangfa was an extremely crafty and calculating man, even in front of his daughter he would not reveal his intentions. When he lost the book, he searched frantically but to no avail. He pretended as if nothing happened and slowly observed, using various methods to investigate and probe potential suspects. Was it that little brat Di Yun who stole it? Was it his own daughter who stole it? However, Qi Fang did not actually "steal" it, so she did not feel the least bit guilty. Naturally, Qi Zhangfa could not figure this out.

Wan Zhenshan returned from the streets. He was just eating dimsum at a restaurant when he heard his granddaughter calling for him. He thought that his son's condition had changed for the worse and at once, without even finishing his bowl of beans, he put down his chopsticks and rushed home while carrying his granddaughter. He made his way upstairs and heard Wan Gui's delightful voice. "There is actually such a remarkable technique in this world. Fang'mei, how did you splash water on the book? This is fate, it was really meant to be!"

When Wan Zhenshan heard the tone of his son's voice he became more relaxed and made his way inside the room. Wan Gui was holding up the "Tang Poem Anthology" and called out: "Father, look at what I have!"

Wan Zhenshan saw the thin yellow book and his heart immediately trembled. He urgently put down his granddaughter and took the book from his son. His heart was bouncing all over his chest. The "Liancheng Manual" that he had been searching for for over a dozen years was right in front of his eyes.

Indeed, this really was the book! This was indeed the book that he and his martial brothers took after they combined forces to kill their teacher. The three of them tossed and turned at the inn and stared at this book day and night. But this was nothing more than an ordinary book of Tang poems, no different from any other "Tang Poem Anthology" that can be bought from the market. Their teacher had taught them the Tang Poem Swordplay, the verses of the Tang poem served as names to the sword stances. All these verses were in this book. But what does the Liancheng Manual of legend have anything to do with this?"

The three of them had once put the book under sunlight to shine trying to discover if there was some kind of hidden layer. They tried to read the dozens of poems in the book in chronological order, in reverse order, reading horizontally, reading diagonally, reading every other word, reading every other two words... they wanted to find the hidden secret in the book, but all their efforts were in vain. The three of them began to suspect each other. They were afraid that one of them had already figured out the secret but did not want to share it. At night the book would be locked inside an iron chest. The iron chest was held together by three iron chains, and each chain was tied on each of their wrists. But one morning the book simply disappeared without a trace and never appeared again.

And that was the start of their endless strife for the next dozen or so years. He tried every method to find the book, yet all of a sudden, it is right in front of his eyes.

Wan Zhenshan flipped to the fourth page. Indeed, the top left corner was slightly torn. That was the mark that he left when he took the book that year. He was afraid that Brother Yan or Brother Qi would replace the book with a fake copy and keep him in the dark.

Wan Zhenshan flipped to the sixteenth page. Indeed, the fingernail print that he left was still there. This really was the book! He nodded his head and tried his best to suppress his inner happiness. He said: "This is the book. Where did you get it from?"

Wan Gui turned to look at Qi Fang and said: "Fang'mei, where did you get the book?"

Qi Fang looked at Wan Gui's expression the entire time. She only thought of her father. "I wonder where father is? I am really an unfilial daughter—I hid his book inside a cave and caused him to expend so much effort to look for it. Father must treat this book like his most prized possession. I wonder what this book is used for? Since I took this book from my father, it naturally belongs to my father. I can't let father-in-law take it away."

If this had been just one day ago, she would not have known the inner story of Di Yun's tragedy. She would be full of tenderness and consideration for her husband. Her love for her husband may not necessarily be inferior to her love for her father. Besides, she doesn't even know where her father is, nor did she know if he would ever return. But now it is an entirely different story. "I must not let father's book fall into their hands. Even if I am not doing this for father, I am doing this for Brother Di!"

When Wan Gui asked her where she got the book from, she only thought: "How can I take the book back?" The book was now in her father-in-law's hands. Wan Zhenshan had outstanding martial arts and her husband was right beside her, obviously she could not simply just take it. Her thoughts changed rapidly and her eyes skated across the room.

She saw that the copper bowl was beside the book, and the bowl was half-filled with bloody water. This was the bowl that Wan Gui used to wash his face and a lot of the poisonous blood dripped from the back of his hand. The water in this bowl was a dark purple colour... if she quietly put the book inside the bowl, they may not be able to find it. However, she was afraid that the book would be ruined. But if she did not take the opportunity now, she would not have another chance. She would rather ruin the book than let them have their way...

Wan Gui and his father both stared intensely at Qi Fang. Wan Gui repeated: "Fang'mei, where did you get this book from?"

Qi Fang shivered and said: "I don't know. A moment ago when I left your room I saw this book placed on the table. Is it not yours?"

Wan Gui did not understand and momentarily did not pursue further. He had to tell his amazing discovery to his father. "Father, take a look. When the page is soaked with water, the words will appear." He extended his hand to point at the handwriting beside the poem "Sacred Fruit Temple" that was written "33".



(If he knew that this was his wife's tears. If he knew that she cried because she longed for Di Yun, what would he think?)

Wan Zhenshan extended his fingers to point at the poem and recited the words of the poem:

*"The road follows the peak, examining the Ficus pumila.  
Reaching the end of a lake, distant coasts climb over mountains.  
Ancient wood clusters green mists, remote sky immerses white waves.  
Underneath the city..."*

The thirty-third character was "city". Wan Zhenshan slapped his thigh and said: "Right, this is the correct way! So that is where the secret lies. Gui'er, you are really intelligent. To be able to come up with such a method! We have to use water, that's right, we never tried using water!"

(If he knew that this was his daughter-in-law's tears. If he knew that she cried because she missed another man so dearly, what would he think?)

Qi Fang saw that father and son were so happy that they were mad, discussing together the secrets of the book. She brought her daughter back to the inner room and hugged her. She asked: "Water Spinach, look at this washbowl, do you see it?"

The little girl nodded her head. "I see it."

Qi Fang said: "In a moment your grandpa and your papa and mama will rush outside. Mama will place grandpa's book in the drawer. You will take it quietly and throw it inside the bowl and let it sink in the bowl. Don't let papa and grandpa see this so they can't find it."

The little girl was delighted. She thought her mama was playing some kind of amusing game and shouted: "Ya! Ya!"

Qi Fang said: "You cannot let grandpa and papa know, nor can you tell them about it!"

The little girl said: "Water Spinach will not tell. Water Spinach will not tell!"

Qi Fang walked to the outside of the other room and said: "Father-in-law, I think there is something really strange about this book."

Wan Zhenshan turned around asked, "What is so strange?" He had already thought that it did not make much sense for this book to just randomly appear in front of him, it all seemed too easy. He was afraid that there was a bad omen. When his daughter-in-law spoke such words, it furthered his suspicions.

Qi Fang said: "It is over here!" She reached out with her hands. Wan Zhenshan handed the book over to her.

Qi Fang opened the book and took out the two paper butterflies. "Father-in-law, did this book originally have these two butterflies?"

Wan Zhenshan received the two butterflies and inspected it carefully and answered, “No!”

Qi Fang said: “Then what is the meaning? In the martial world, is there anyone nicknamed ‘Flower Butterfly’ or a Butterfly Sect? I fear that they harbour malicious intentions when leaving behind this book.”

It was very typical of realm folk to leave a warning sign of vendetta. Wan Zhenshan had committed so many crimes in his life, naturally he had many enemies. When he heard Qi Fang say these words, he saw that the pair of butterflies were cut out with extreme precision, he became slightly fearful and startled. He thought: “Do I have an enemy nicknamed ‘Flower Butterfly’ or a clan called ‘Butterfly Sect’?”

He was muttering to himself irresolutely when suddenly he heard Qi Fang shout: “Who is it? Who is being sneaky?” She pointed at something on the roof outside the window. Wan Zhenshan and his son both looked outside the window at the same time. Qi Fang turned and grabbed two long swords leaning against the wall. She gave one to Wan Zhenshan and the other to Wan Gui and shouted: “There is someone on the rooftop!”

Wan Zhenshan and his son took the weapons. Qi Fang opened the drawer and threw the book inside. She said quietly, “We can’t let our enemies take it!” The other two nodded in agreement.

The three of them jumped out the window together and climbed over the rooftops. They looked all around but there was no one to be seen. Wan Zhenshan said: “Let’s look at the back!”

The three of them rushed to the back garden and saw a shadow at the junction of two walls. Wan Zhenshan shouted: “Who is it?” He leapt forward and saw that it was his sixth disciple Wu Kan. He asked: “Did you see the enemy?”

Wu Kan saw his teacher, martial brother, and martial sister-in-law all rushing forward with sword in hand and knew that something had happened. He turned deathly pale when he heard his teacher’s inquiry. He urgently said: “Someone ran from over there, your disciple rushed forward to investigate.” He was trying to conceal his own faults but unwittingly reinforced Qi Fang’s lie as well.

The four of them rushed all the way outside the rear door. Wu Kan repeatedly called out for help and beckoned Lu Kun, Bu Yuan, and the others to join the search. However, they could not find any trace of this “enemy”.

Wan Zhenshan and Wan Gui were concerned about the Liancheng Manual and ordered Lu Kun and the others to continue searching and told Qi Fang to go back inside with them. Wan Zhenshan opened the drawer and extended his hands...

How would the book still be in the drawer?

The ones surnamed Wan were completely startled. They searched frantically around the room, but how could they find it? They asked the little girl, “Did anyone come inside?”

The little girl replied: “No one!” She turned her head and winked at her mama, extremely proud of herself.

Wan Zhenshan and Wan Gui clearly saw that Qi Fang placed the book in the drawer, and during their pursuit of the enemy they did not once leave her side. Naturally she was not the one who took it. It must have been the enemy who carried out a stratagem of “moving the tiger out of the mountain” and stole the sword manual!

The two of them looked at each other in dismay, incessantly depressed.

Qi Fang winked at her daughter. Her daughter winked back at her. It was a happy sight.

## Chapter 11 – Building a Wall



*Wan Zhenshan repeatedly grabbed something in the air and placed it neatly in a row. It appeared as if he was piling up a lot of bricks together, but under the moonlight it was clear that there was nothing there at all.*

The disciples of the Wan clan were flustered for a while. But how could they find the enemy?

Wan Zhenshan instructed Qi Fang that she was not mention how they found and lost the sword manual to the other disciples. Qi Fang promised without reservations. Over the years, Qi Fang became more and more aware of the relationships between the various disciples of the clan. Each one of them had their own plan, and they would always be wary of each other. Wan Zhenshan collected his anger and returned to his own room. All he thought about was the butterfly insignia. Who could his enemy be? Why would this person bring the manual and then take it back? Is this person the one who saved Yan Daping? Could it be Yan Daping himself?

Wan Gui exerted a lot of energy to chase the enemy. Consequently, his blood flow circulated quicker and his hand began to hurt again. He lied down on the bed to rest and slept for a while.

Qi Fang pondered: "My father must have some use for this book. It has been submerged in blood water so long, it must be ruined now!" She went inside the room and called for "San'ge" twice but saw that he was in a deep sleep, so she went to get the copper bowl and emptied the bloody water in the well outside, revealing the book. She thought: "Water Spinach is really clever!" Her face was full of joy.

This book was completely immersed in bloody water and had a really bad smell that assailed the nostrils. Qi Fang unwillingly picked up the book and wondered: "Where should I hide it?" She thought of the side room in the back garden that was always filled with sieves, hoes, rock mortars, fans, and other miscellaneous items. She figured that nobody would go there, so at once she picked a few leaves from a chrysanthemum to cover up the book. It now looked like a dish of chrysanthemum leaves. Then she went to the back garden. She entered the west room and concealed the book in the middle of a fan and thought: "This fan is only used when we collect rent. If I hide it here, nobody should find it."

She threw away the bowl and began to whistle a light tune, pretending as if nothing happened. She passed through the corridor when all of a sudden, a person appeared at the junction of two walls and spoke softly, "Tonight at the third watch, I will wait for you in the firewood room. Don't forget!" It was Wu Kan.

Qi Fang was already a bit frightened. When he saw him just suddenly appear and said these words her heart rate shot up the roof. She spat in disgust. "You really have the nerves of a wild dog, do you not value your own life?"

Wu Kan salivated and said: "I am most willing to lose my life for you. Martial sister-in-law, do you want the antidote?"

Qi Fang clenched her teeth and with her left hand she reached for the handle of her dagger. She wanted to attack him when he least expects and take the antidote away from him.

Wu Kan laughed and said softly: "If you execute a stance of 'The Mountain Approaches from the Face' and brandish your blade to attack, I will evade with a stance of 'The Cloud Approaches the Pier' and conveniently through the antidote into the pond." As he said this he extended his hand forward holding the bottle of antidote. He was afraid that Qi Fang would try to take it and backed away two steps.

Qi Fang knew that she would not be able to take it by force and walked over to his side. Wu Kan said: “I will only wait until the third watch. If you do not come on the third watch, by the fourth watch I will take the antidote with me and run away, I will never return to Jingzhou. If I surnamed Wu have to die, I will definitely not die at the hands of the Wan family.”

Qi Fang returned to her room and was greeted with the painful moans of Wan Gui. It was evident that the scorpion poison was acting up again. She sat on the bedside and thought: “He caused so much suffering for martial brother, his methods are extremely despicable. But the deed has already been committed, what more can be done? Either martial brother has a life full of hardships, or I have a life full of hardships. I have been treated so well all these years. A woman should follow whatever her husband orders. I will be his wife for the rest of our lives. But that scoundrel Wu Kan is extremely repulsive, how can I take the antidote from him?”

She saw that Wan Gui became more pale and withered, and both his eyes sunk deeply. “San’ge is seriously injured, if I tell him now, he will fight a battle with Wu Kan to the death. That would only make things worse.”

The sky slowly turned dark. Qi Fang absentmindedly ate her dinner, then she settled her daughter to sleep. She kept pondering whether she should tell her father-in-law, thinking that since he is such a rigorous schemer, he would have a way to deal with the problem. But she could not let her husband know about it, so she had to wait until he was asleep before telling her father-in-law. Qi Fang slept beside Wan Gui. In the past few days of attending for her husband she did not get a single good night’s sleep. She waited until Wan Gui was in a deep sleep before she quietly got up and went outside to find Wan Zhenshan.

The house was lighted and there were some weird sounds coming from inside, “Hey! Hey! Hey!” it sounded like as if someone was using a lot of energy to do something. Qi Fang felt strange, originally she already arrived at the door and called for her father-in-law, but then she withdrew. From the narrow slit of the window she peeked into the insides of the room. The moonlight illuminated through the window into the room. She saw Wan Zhenshan lying supine on his bed, both hands slowly pushing against the air. Both his eyes were shut tightly.

Qi Fang thought: “Father-in-law must be practicing some profound martial arts. He must not be interfered by external affairs or he might fire deviate. I should not call him now. I will wait until he finishes his training.”

She saw Wan Zhenshan pushing against the air with both hands, then he slowly sat up and placed his feet on the ground. He walked a few steps before crouching down and appeared to be grabbing something in midair. Qi Fang thought: “Father-in-law must be practicing a capturing technique.”

After watching for some more time, she saw Wan Zhenshan’s movements were more and more strange. Wan Zhenshan repeatedly grabbed something in the air and placed it neatly in a row. It appeared as if he was piling up a lot of bricks together, but under the moonlight it was clear that there was nothing there at all.

All of a sudden, she recalled what Tao Hong said to her at the memorial hall. “*Master builds walls in the middle of the night!*” But Wan Zhenshan’s movements did not look like he was building a wall. It appeared more as if he was tearing down a wall.

She saw him grabbing for a while, comparing the size to his hands and figured that it was big enough, then with both hands he stroked a posture as if he was picking up something heavy and placed it in front of him. Qi Fang watched, incessantly perplexed. She saw that both his eyes were closed and his movements did not appear to be that of practicing martial arts. It looked more like a mute putting on a play.

After a while Qi Fang became worried. She thought: "Father-in-law has contracted somnambulism! According to physicians, people with this disease will get up in their dreams to do something. Some people will walk around the roof without any clothes on, others will even commit arson and murder. But when they wake up they won't remember anything about it." She continued to watch as Wan Zhenshan stuffed these imaginary items into the imaginary hole that he created in the wall. After he finished stuffing these items, he exerted some force to pile it firmly together, before he picked up the imaginary bricks on the ground and set the wall back together.

Indeed, he really was building a wall! There was a faint smile on his face with an air of complacency as he piled the bricks.

At first when Qi Fang saw the gloomy expression on his face she was absolutely horrified, but when she realized that he was building an imaginary wall, her heart had already figured as much so she was relieved. "According to Tao Hong, father-in-law has had somnambulism for a while now. Naturally, he would not want anyone to know this. Tao Hong sleeps with him, so naturally she must have known. Father-in-law must have been very unhappy about this." When she realized this, it helped solve a chain of suspicions in her heart, as she figured out why Tao Hong was kicked out of the house. Then she thought: "I wonder how long he will build this wall for. If he continues past the third watch, then Wu Kan will really take the antidote and run away, then there will be trouble."

She saw Wan Zhenshan place the bricks he took down and stuff it into the hole in the wall. Then followed that he sealed it with quicklime and continued working until he was satisfied. His face revealed a smile and he went back to sleep.

Qi Fang thought: "Father-in-law has been working hard, he is probably not very conscious. I will let him rest for a while before I call him."

At the same time, she suddenly heard someone lightly knock on the front door, softly calling, "Father! Father!" It was the voice of her husband Wan Gui. Qi Fang thought: "Why is San'ge here? What is he doing here?"

Wan Zhenshan got up immediately and asked: "Is it Gui'er?"

Wan Gui replied: "It is me!"

Wan Zhenshan got off the bed and opened the door latch to invite Wan Gui inside. "Have you found any news of the sword manual?"

Wan Gui shouted: "Father!" He extended his left hand to hold the back of a chair. The moonlight seeped in through the window slits and reflected the hazy figure apparently slightly swaying.

Qi Fang was afraid that her own shadow would be seen, so she ducked beneath the window to listen. She did not dare to watch their movements.

She heard Wan Gui say: “Your daughter-in-law... your daughter-in-law... she is not a good person.”

Qi Fang was startled. “Why would he say such a thing?”

She heard Wan Zhenshan ask: “What’s that? Have the two of you got into an argument?”

Wan Gui said: “I found the sword manual. It was your daughter-in-law who took it.”

Wan Zhenshan said: “You found it? That’s good! Where did you find it?”

Qi Fang was extremely perplexed. “How does he know? It must be that Water Spinach could not help but reveal it.” But the next thing Wan Gui said immediately told her that her suspicions were incorrect. Wan Gui said that she saw Qi Fang and his daughter winking at each other and became suspicious. He thought there was something strange about it and pretended to fall asleep, then from the window slit he observed Qi Fang’s movements. He saw her taking the copper bowl to the back garden and followed along. He saw her put the sword manual inside a fan in the west room of the back garden.

Qi Fang sighed inwardly. “My poor father, in the end, the book will still be taken by father-in-law and San’ge. It will be next to impossible for me to take it back. Very well, I admit defeat. San’ge has always been more difficult to deal with than me.”

She heard Wan Zhenshan say, “Very well then, we will take the manual. You will pretend as if nothing happened and see how she reacts. If she does not mention it, you do not need to expose her. I am still suspicious as to where the book came from, I’m afraid... I’m afraid... I’m afraid..” He said “I’m afraid” three times but did not continue.

Wan Gui called: “Father!” His voice was somewhat painful.

Wan Zhenshan asked: “What is it?”

Wan Gui said, “Your daughter-in-law... your daughter-in-law stole our sword manual, she did it for...” As he said up to this point, his voice trembled.

Wan Zhenshan said: “For whom?”

Wan Gui said: “She did it for... for that dog thief Wu Kan!”

Qi Fang’s heart trembled violently. She could hardly believe what she heard. “I did it because of father, why would I do it for Wu Kan? Would I do it for that dog thief Wu Kan?”

Wan Zhenshan’s voice was too full of disbelief. “She did it because of Wu Kan?” he repeated.

Wan Gui said, “Yes! I saw that bitch hide the sword manual in the back garden and I followed her. Then I saw her... saw her at the winding corridor. She was flirting with that bastard Wu Kan. That whore... she is shameless!”



Wan Zhenshan muttered to himself and said: "I can see that she is usually an upright and well-behaved person. It doesn't look like she would do such a thing. Are you sure you saw her? What did the two of them say?"

Wan Gui said, "Your son I was afraid that they would notice so I did not dare to get too close. There are no hidden areas around the corridor, so I could only hide behind the junction of the walls. The two of them spoke very quietly so I could not hear everything, but... but I heard a good half of it."

Wan Zhenshan groaned and said: "My son, you do not need to be angry. How can a gentleman suffer from a loss of a wife? Now that we have the sword manual, we only have to decipher the secret inside, then we will be showered with wealth. Even if you want to buy a hundred concubines that would be incredibly easy. Sit down and explain everything to me slowly!"

Qi Fang heard the groaning of the board mattress as Wan Gui sat down on the bed. He said: "That whore concealed the manual and was so proud of herself she even sang a little tune. As soon as that whoremonger saw her, his face was full of delight and said: 'Tonight at the third watch, I will wait for you in the firewood room. Don't forget!' I heard him say these exact words very clearly."

Wan Zhenshan was enraged. "How did the whore reply?"

Wan Gui said, "She... she said: 'You really have the nerves of a wild dog, do you not value your own life?'"

Qi Fang was totally confused and upset. "The two of them keep calling me a whore, how... how could they wrong me like this? San'ge, I am doing this all for you, I want to get the antidote to cure your injuries, yet you dishonour me in such a way. Do you have any conscience?"

Wan Gui continued: "I... when I heard this, I was so mad that I wanted to kill them both immediately with a sword. But I did not bring a sword and I am also weak from my injuries, so I could not fight them head on. I returned to my room at once in case that whore doesn't see me when she returns and becomes suspicious. What the whore and whoremonger said after that I did not hear."

Wan Zhenshan said: "Hmph, like father like daughter, the two of them are both shameless! We will first take the sword manual, then we will wait for them outside the firewood room. We will catch that cheating couple in the act, then the two of them can't complain after death!"

Wan Gui added: "That whore was so horny she could not even wait until the third watch. She went out a long time ago. Now... now..." As he said up to this point, he clenched his teeth hard.

Wan Zhenshan said: "Then we will go right away. Go get a sword first. You do not need to attack first. Wait until I cut off their arms and legs, then you can personally take their worthless lives."

Qi Fang watched as the door opened. Wan Zhenshan helped Wan Gui by the shoulder, and the two of them rushed to the back garden.

Qi Fang leaned her body against the wall, her tears constantly dripping on her sleeves. All along she had only hoped that her husband would recover from his injuries, yet now her husband suspects her. Her father left her and never returned, her martial brother has too suffered his own injustices, now... now even her husband is treating her like this. How can anyone live in such despair? Her

heart was completely torn, she no longer wished to live. She did not consider explaining herself to her husband, nor did she consider confronting Wu Kan to reveal the truth. She only leaned herself against the wall, completely paralyzed.

After a while she heard the sounds of footsteps approaching. Wan Gui and his father returned and discussed quietly. Wan Gui said: "Father, why did you not kill Wu Kan just now?"

Wan Zhenshan said: "Only the whoremonger was there. The whore must have got wind and escaped ahead of time. We were unable to catch both of them in the act. We are a prestigious family in Jingzhou, how can we so casually kill a person? After we get the manual, there are still many things that we have to do, there is no time to meddle in such petty affairs! We cannot act arbitrarily."

"So we are just going to let them go? How am I supposed to repress my anger?" complained Wan Gui.

"If you want to vent anger, how hard is that? We will use the old trick!"

"What old trick?" inquired Wan Gui.

"The same old trick we use to deal with Qi Zhangfa!" He paused for a moment. "Return to your room first. I will assemble the disciples together and then you will come with the rest of them outside my room. Don't arouse any suspicions."

Qi Fang's mind was still in a complete mess. She did not have half a clue what to do next. She only thought: "I don't want to live, but what about Water Spinach? Who's going to take care of her?" When she heard Wan Zhenshan say something about using an old trick he used to deal with Qi Zhangfa to deal with Wu Kan, her mind felt as if an ice chunk was placed on it, at once she was wide awake and thought: "How are they going to deal with my father? I must find out until the water recedes and the rocks appear. Father-in-law will gather all his disciples outside his room, then I must not delay. Where can I eavesdrop?"

She heard Wan Gui agree and leave. Wan Zhenshan went outside the hall and called loudly for his servant to light a lamp. Not before long voices came from both the front and back, the various disciples and the servant assembled from all directions. Qi Fang knew that after only a bit more time someone would pass by the window, she hesitated and then at once as quick as lightning entered Wan Zhenshan's room and tore open the curtains and squeezed herself under the bed. The curtains of the bed were drooping low to the floor, if no one intentionally tried to uncover it they would not find her.

She reclined herself under the bed. After a while she saw light translating through the curtains; someone had lit a lamp and went inside the room. She saw Wan Zhenshan's shoes enter the room, both feet making their way to a chair. The chair gave off a slight hindrance as Wan Zhenshan sat down. Then she heard him tell the servant to close the door.

The eldest disciple Lu Kun and fifth disciple Bu Yuan were injured on the left leg and right arm by Yan Daping back in Yuanling. But fortunately only their bones were broken and they did not suffer too heavily. Right now they were in recovery, but because of their teacher's urgent gathering they were still on bandages and walking sticks to await their orders.

She heard the eldest disciple Lu Kun say, "Teacher, we are all here now. We await your orders."

Wan Zhenshan said: "Very good, you come in first!"

Qi Fang saw the door pushed open, Lu Kun's feet walking inside. Then the door closed.

Wan Zhenshan said: "Our enemies are here for us, do you know that?"

Lu Kun asked, "Who is it? Your disciple does not know."

Wan Zhenshan said: "This person disguised himself as a physician and came to our house today."

Qi Fang thought: "Could it be that he knows who that physician is? Who is he?"

Lu Kun said: "Your disciple heard from Brother Wu. Teacher, who is our enemy?"

Wan Zhenshan said: "This person likes to disguise himself. I did not take a good look so I could not figure out his background. Early next morning I want you to search the north part of the city. You may take your leave now. I will give you further instructions later."

Lu Kun agreed and left.

Wan Zhenshan called his fourth disciple Sun Jun and fifth disciple Bu Yuan inside. He said similar things to them; he asked Sun Jun to search the south part of the city and Bu Yuan to search the east part of the city. He also added: "Let Wu Kan search the west part of the city, Feng Tan and Shen Cheng will work together in coordination for information. Your Brother Wan has not yet recovered from his injuries and cannot leave."

Bu Yuan said: "Right, Brother Wan should get some more rest." He opened the door and left.

Qi Fang knew that these words were intentionally said for Wu Kan's ears so that he would not harbour any suspicions. Then Wan Zhenshan said: "Wu Kan, come inside!" This was said the same way he called the other disciples. It was not especially strict or gentle.

Qi Fang saw the door open again. When Wu Kan placed one leg in the room he felt a bit hesitant, but eventually came in. He slowly walked a few more steps, Qi Fang had a clear view of the lower half of his gown and saw a slight tremble. She knew that he was very scared.

Wan Zhenshan said: "Our enemies came for us, did you know that?"

Wu Kan said: "Your disciple heard from outside the room. It is that physician who sold us the medicine. It was your disciple who asked him to take a look at Brother Wan's condition. I did not realize that he was our enemy. Your disciple asks for forgiveness."

Wan Zhenshan said: "This person has disguised himself, I cannot blame you for not being able to recognize him. Early next morning, I want you to investigate the west parts of the city. If you see him, pay attention to his every move."

Wu Kan said: "Yes!"

All of a sudden, Wan Zhenshan stood up with both legs. Qi Fang could not resist the temptation to extend her hands to uncover a corner of the curtain to look outside. What she saw made her so pale with fright that she almost cried out.

She saw that Wan Zhenshan had already clutched Wu Kan by the throat with both hands. Wu Kan used his hands to resist Wan Zhenshan's clutch, but it was completely ineffective. She saw Wu Kan's eyes protruding outwards like a goldfish, opening wider and wider. Wu Kan scratched and clawed so frantically that the back of Wan Zhenshan's hands started to bleed from his fingernail attacks. But he continued his hold on Wu Kan's throat and would not let go no matter what. Wu Kan could not even utter half a noise, and soon his body began to sway. After a while, both his hands slowly dropped down. Qi Fang saw his tongue was extended out, his expression very terrifying. She became extremely frightened. It was not until Wu Kan was completely motionless before Wan Zhenshan let go of his hold and placed him on the chair. Then from the table he grabbed two cotton cloths that he had wet beforehand and placed it on his mouth and nose. This way Wu Kan could not breathe and would definitely not wake up.

Qi Fang's heart was bouncing all over her chest. She thought: "Father-in-law said that they are an aristocratic family and will not easily kill people. I heard that Wu Kan's father is a local gentleman, he will not let this matter drop easily. I think this will become a serious issue."

At this same time she suddenly heard Wan Zhenshan's coarse yell: "You better confess to everything that you've done, or do you want me to take action?"

Qi Fang was startled. "So it turns out that father-in-law saw me." But in her heart she was not frightened. "I will die by his hands then, I don't want to live anyway!"

She was about to reveal herself from under the bed when suddenly she heard Wu Kan say, "Teacher, what... what do you want disciple to confess?"

Qi Fang was completely startled. How could Wu Kan speak again. Did he come back to life? That was clearly not the case; he was still on the chair completely motionless. She peeked from under the bed and saw Wan Zhenshan's lips move. She thought: "What? So it is father-in-law who is speaking, not Wu Kan. But how come I heard Wu Kan's voice?"

She heard Wan Zhenshan shout: "Confess what? Hmph, Wu Kan, you really have some guts. You sent a mole inside and colluded with bandits. Are you planning on a big trade in Jingzhou?"

"Teacher, what... what trade is your disciple doing?"

This time Qi Fang saw everything very clearly. It was Wan Zhenshan mimicking Wu Kan's voice. She was startled that the voice was actually so alike. "So father-in-law actually has the ability to mimic the voices of his own disciples, I never knew this. But what's the point of scolding Wu Kan so loudly?" She faintly remembered something, but it was a very hazy reflection that she did not understand. She only felt an unfathomable fear in her heart.

She heard Wan Zhensan say, "Hmph, you think I don't know? You were the one who brought that physician to Jingzhou; that person is actually a local bandit. Wu Kan, you collaborated with him, you wanted to infiltrate..."

"Teacher, what does your disciple want to infiltrate?"

"You wanted to infiltrate into the mansion of Magistrate Ling. You wanted to steal a classified document, am I right? Wu Kan, you... you are still denying this?"

"Teacher, you... how did you know? Teacher, please consider my filial piety for you over all these years, please forgive me, your disciple does not dare to do such a thing again!"

"Wu Kan, how can such a serious matter be forgiven so easily?"

Qi Fang figured out that Wan Zhenshan's imitation of Wu Kan's voice was actually not that similar. It's just that he lowered his voice and spoke with extreme obscurity, and every sentence was uttered with formal addresses of "teacher" and "disciple" so naturally others would think that Wu Kan was speaking. Everyone saw Wu Kan enter the room and heard him converse with Wan Zhenshan. Even if the voice was not completely alike, besides Wu Kan, who else could be speaking? Furthermore, Wan Zhenshan constantly addressed this speaker as "Wu Kan".

He saw Wan Zhenshan lightly tap Wu Kan's body. Then he slowly bent his lower back and reached for the bed curtain with his left hand. Qi Fang was so scared that her heart nearly stopped beating. She thought: "Father-in-law must have discovered me. He is going to strangle me to death!"

From the hazy lighting she saw a head drilling into the area under the bed, it was Wu Kan's head. His eyes were wide open and really looked like a dead goldfish. Qi Fang could only do her best to get out of the way, but Wu Kan's body kept forcing itself inside and hit both her legs and waist.

She heard Wan Zhenshan sit down on the chair and with a very stern voice and scolded: "Wu Kan, why haven't you kneeled down? I will tie you up and send you to Magistrate Ling. Whether you will be forgiven or not is up to him, I cannot decide."

"Teacher, will you really not forgive your disciple?"

"To think that I taught such a disciple, you have really shamed the Wan family to no end. I... how can I forgive you?"

Qi Fang peeked from the curtains and saw Wan Zhenshan take out a dagger from his waist area, lightly stabbing it into his own chest. Although the chest part of his garment was cushioned by softwood and moist clay and items like pastries, when the dagger stabbed into his chest it still went in and didn't budge.

Qi Fang now understood his intentions. She heard Wan Zhenshan say, "Wu Kan, will you not kneel!" Then he lowered his voice to imitate Wu Kan's voice. "Teacher, you made me do this, do not fault your disciple!" Wan Zhenshan let out an "Aiyo!" then with a flying kick he kicked open the window and shouted: "Little thief, you... you dare to attack me?"

A loud crash was heard, someone kicked open the door. Wan Gui was the first to enter. (He already knew beforehand that now was the time to break and enter.) Lu Kun, Sun Jun, Bu Yuan, and the others followed closely behind. Wan Zhenshan held his chest, fresh blood dripping from his fingers. (This is likely from a bottle of red water that he carried with him.) He began to sway and pointed at

the window, shouting: “Wu Kan that thief, he... he stabbed me and ran away! Quick... chase him!” After he said this, he slanted his body and fell on the bed.

Wan Gui cried out in fear. “Father! Father! How is your injury?”

Lu Kun, Sun Jun, Bu Yuan, Feng Tan, and Shen Cheng all rushed outside the window, shouting and quarrelling as they rushed out. Various people from the mansion began to cry out in alarm and shout in grievances.

Qi Fang remained under the bed, she felt Wu Kan’s body colder and colder. She was extremely frightened and did not dare to move in the slightest. Her father-in-law sat on the bed while her husband was standing beside him.

She heard Wan Zhenshan quietly say: “Is anyone suspicious?”

Wan Gui said, “Nope. Father, that was a really good ruse. Just like Qi Zhangfa, not a single trace of error.”

*Just like Qi Zhangfa, not a single trace of error!* These words stabbed into Qi Fang’s heart like a sharp dagger. Originally she had already faintly understood this extremely terrible truth, but she did not dare to believe it. She thought: “Father-in-law always treated me in an amiable manner, my husband has always been tender and considerate, why would they harm my father?” But this time she saw it with her very own eyes, she saw how they set up such a brilliant trap to kill Wu Kan. That day when she heard outside the study room how Qi Zhangfa and Wan Zhenshan were arguing, how Wan Zhenshan was stabbed by her father, and how her father escaped from the window”, obviously, all of this was planned beforehand by Wan Zhenshan. This time it was no different. Then it must be the case that her father was killed a long time ago, he... he imitated her father’s voice. No wonder her father’s voice was so hoarse and completely different from usual. If not for this coincidence that she just happened to witness the incident, how would she ever have figured out the truth?

She heard Wan Gui say, “What about that bitch? What shall we do with her?”

Wan Zhenshan said: “We will find her and torture her slowly. But we must do it with obscurity such that no human can know about it and no ghost will feel it. We cannot tarnish the reputation of the Wan family, our reputation.”

Wan Gui said: “Yes, father has really planned this out carefully. Ayo...”

Wan Zhenshan said: “What is it?”

Wan Gui said: “The wound on the back of my hand is hurting again.”

Wan Zhenshan sighed. Although he was full of multifarious schemes, he was completely helpless against this situation.

Qi Fang slowly extended her hands to reach for Wu Kan’s bosom. That little bottle was coldly placed inside his pocket. She took it out and put it in her own bosom. She felt really bitter inside. “San’ge, oh San’ge, you only heard half the story and already accuse me of committing adultery with that thief. You did not want to understand the whole truth hence you did not listen to everything. This

antidote was on him the whole time. Your father has killed him now. Originally to take back the antidote would be as easy as lifting a finger, but now you don't even know about it."

Lu Kun and the others could not catch up to Wu Kan and returned one by one. All of them made their way to Wan Zhenshan's room to await further orders. Wan Zhenshan exposed his chest, he was bandaged from neck to chest and to his back then back to his neck.

This time, the "injury" he suffered was not as "severe" as before. Wu Kan's martial arts were not as high as Qi Zhangfa's, so naturally the dagger did not penetrate deeply and caused no serious injuries. The various disciples felt at ease, they all cursed Wu Kan for being so ungrateful. They all said that they would find his father tomorrow to settle the matter. They wished their teacher a speedy recovery and left the room. Wan Gui sat on the bed alongside his father.

Qi Fang wanted to find an opportunity to escape. She was reclining next to Wu Kan's body and felt an indescribable fear in her heart. She was afraid that the two would notice her, but she could not figure out a good way to escape.

Wan Zhenshan said: "We will first take care of the body in case we give ourselves away."

Wan Gui said: "Should we deal with him just like we did with Qi Zhangfa?"

Wan Zhenshan muttered to himself and said: "We will use the old trick."

Qi Fang was in tears. "How did they deal with my father?" she wondered.

Wan Gui said: "You built it here? You sleep here too, that wouldn't be too good!"

Wan Zhenshan said: "I will temporarily move out and sleep at your place in case of trouble. How would others so easily put the sword manual on our hands? We will deal with this menace together. In the future when we are showered with wealth, do you think we won't be able to find a place to live?"

When Qi Fang heard the word "build", an image suddenly flashed through her mind like lightning. She understood completely. "He... he hid my father's body inside a wall, hiding any traces of the body. No wonder after father left there was no more news of him. No wonder father-in-law... no, not father-in-law... no wonder the treacherous Wan Zhenshan began to build walls in the middle of the night. He has done so many bad deeds he must feel guilty at heart and conceived somnambulism. Even in his dreams he would wake up and build walls. That treacherous bandit... that treacherous bandit would actually feel guilty... that is really strange. No, he does not feel guilty. He is very proud of himself, he keeps repeating the same action of building a wall unconsciously, but he was building it in his dreams, yet he was smiling the whole time?"

She heard Wan Gui say, "Father, what is the secret behind that sword manual? You said that we will become showered with wealth and overwhelm the world? Could it be that... that it is not a martial arts manual, but a treasure?"

Wan Zhenshan said: "Of course it is not a martial arts manual. In the sword manual is written the location of a great treasure. The old Mei Niansheng's thoughts must have been clouded by pig oil, he

actually passed the sword manual to an outsider. Haha, well he is dead now. Gui'er, quickly take out the sword manual."

Wan Gui hesitated slightly and then took out the book from his bosom. It turns out that as soon as Qi Fang hid the book inside the fan, Wan Gui had already taken it out.

Wan Zhenshan glanced at his son and took the book. He skimmed through the pages. The pages near the front and back covers of the book were not yet dried, but the middle of the book was dried.

Wan Zhenshan said softly, "It is hard to say whether the two of us can protect this book. We must first discover the secret within this book, then even if someone takes it from us it's not a big deal. Get a pen, you must write this down carefully. The first stance of Liancheng Swordplay comes from Du Fu's poem 'Spring Returns'. He extended his fingers to his mouth and wet it with saliva, then smeared it on the page beside this poem. He gently cheered and said: "It is the number '4'! Very good, 'Moss track nears river bamboo', the fourth word is "river", you must remember. The second stance is also from Du Fu's poem, it comes from 'Heavy Scripture Manifests Tomb'. He wet his finger again and smeared the page. "Hmm, it is the number '41'! He counted to the number. "5, 10, 15, 20... 'The Emperor's tomb builds empty songs, valiant warriors prefer jade miniature', the forty-first word is 'tomb' ... 'Jiangling'<sup>1</sup>, excellent! So it is in Jingzhou!"

Wan Gui said: "Father, don't speak so loud!"

Wan Zhenshan smiled gently. "Right! I must not be so pleased yet. Gui'er, your father's entire life of efforts are finally not in vain. We have finally discovered this great secret!" All of a sudden, he hid the book and slapped his thigh and softly said: "I finally understand why our enemy gave us the sword manual!"

Wan Gui said: "What is the reason? I never figured it out."

Wan Zhenshan said: "Our enemy found the sword manual, but he could not figure out its secret, what use is that? Our Liancheng Swordplay, every stance is named after a verse from a Tang poem. People from other clans or sects, even if their martial arts were through the roof, they still won't be able to figure it out. In this world, only Yan Daping and I know what poem the first stance comes from, what poem the second stance comes from. That is how I know to search the first number from the poem 'Spring Returns' and to search for the second number from the poem 'Heavy Scripture Manifests Tomb'.

Wan Gui said: "The name of the stances from Liancheng Swordplay, haven't you already explained that to us?"

Wan Zhenshan said: "It is completely out of sequence."

Wan Gui said: "Father, you didn't even teach your own son the actual swordplay."

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<sup>1</sup> The word "river" is pronounced "Jiang" and the word tomb is pronounced "ling". Jiangling is a county in Jingzhou.



Wan Zhenshan felt slightly embarrassed and said: "I have eight disciples and we are together day and night. If I only teach it to you the others will notice, that won't be good."

Wan Gui groaned and said: "That must be our enemy's plan. He knows that the numbers will appear when the pages are soaked in water, hence he purposely soaked some pages in water and handed the book to us so we could figure out the secrets of the book. He will wait until we search for this treasure and then use the stratagem of 'The mighty bandit encounters the grandpa of bandits'."

Wan Zhenshan said: "Correct! We must be extremely cautious, otherwise not only will we not get the treasure, we may lose our lives as well."

He wet his finger again to find the third number. "The third stance comes from Chu Mo's 'Sacred Fruit Temple', the thirty-third word... 'Underneath the city near, the clock sounds mixed with music'; the thirty-third word is 'city. 'Jiangling City', right. Right! What is there to be dubious about? Hmm, why am I so itchy?" He extended his right hand to scratch the back of his left hand; he felt his right hand was itchy too so used his left hand to scratch his right. Then he looked at the sword manual and continued: "The fourth stance, twenty-eighth word, hmm, 5, 10, 15... the twenty-eighth word is 'south'. Now we have 'Jiangling City South'; haha! Hey! It's very itchy! He lowered his head to look at his right hand, he saw the back of his hand had three distinct black lines, he felt very surprised. "I did not write today, why would I have ink marks on the back of my hand?" He felt the back of his hand became itchier and itchier, he looked at his left hand and also saw several streaks of black criss-crossed.

Wan Gui gasped and said: "Father, where... where did that come from? That looks like the poison from Yan Daping's scorpion!"

Wan Zhenshan was reminded by this and felt his hand became even more itchy. He could not resist and began to scratch it.

Wan Gui said: "Don't scratch it, it's... it's your fingernail that is carrying the poison."

Wan Zhenshan shouted: "Aiyo! That really is the case." At once he understood the reason. "That little whore hid the sword manual inside the bloody water... your blood has scorpion poison... that little brat Wu Kan simply would not die in short order, he left several scratches on my hand. Damn it! The scorpion poison is going to seep into my wounds. Fortunately it has not been too long, it should not be too serious. Ayo! Why is it getting more itchy? Aiyo!" He could not help himself and began to moan loudly.

Wan Gui said: "Father, you did not contract much of the scorpion poison. I will get some water for you to clean your wound."

Wan Zhenshan said: "Right!" Then he shouted loudly, "Tao Hong! Tao Hong! Get me some water!"

Wan Gui raised his eyebrows and thought: "Father is so scared he's lost his mind. He kicked Tao Hong out of the house a long time ago, yet he is still calling for her." He carried a copper washbowl out of the room and fetched scooped up a bunch of water from the well outside. Then he went back inside and placed the bowl on the table. Wan Zhenshan hurriedly dipped both hands in water. After some ice-cold sensation, his pain and itchy reduced.

## Chapter 11 – Building a Wall

It should be noted that when the scorpion poison on the back of Wan Gui's hand came into contact with the antidote, the black blood that seeped out of the wound too carried poison. In fact, this poison was even more toxic than the original scorpion poison. When Wu Kan was being strangled by Wan Zhenshan, he scratched frantically and left some deep marks in Wan Zhenshan's hand that penetrated deep into the flesh. As soon as it made contact with this poison, it was even more serious than Wan Gui's condition. When he dipped both his hands in water, it was not long before the water in the entire bowl grew dark. After a while, it became a dense concentration of black ink.

Both Wan Zhenshan and his son turned pale at sight of this. Wan Zhenshan took his hands out of the water and let out an "ah" and almost lost his voice. He saw both hands were swollen like two black beads. Wan Gui said: "Ayo, this is not good. I'm afraid you can't use this water anymore!"

Wan Zhenshan was in so much pain that he kicked his son on the waist and scolded: "If you know that I can't use water, why did you get me water? Are you trying to screw me over?"

Wan Gui was in so much pain he knelt down and said: "I did not know this originally, why would I harm you?"

Qi Fang listened to the two of them bicker from under the bed. She did not know whether to feel desolate, or happy that she would have her vengeance.

She heard Wan Zhenshan say, "What now? What now?"

Wan Gui said: "I have some painkillers upstairs. Although it won't cure the poison it can still momentarily ease your pain. Do you want to use some?"

Wan Zhenshan said: "Yes! Yes! Yes! Get it for me now!"

Wan Gui said: "Whether it will work or not, your son does not know. It's possible that it could make things even worse, then father will kick me again."

Wan Zhenshan scolded: "Son of a lamb turtle! At this point you are still acting like this? Your daddy I gave birth to you, is it such a big deal if I kick you once? Go now! Get it for me!"

Wan Gui replied, "Yes!" and turned to leave.

Wan Zhenshan's hands were swollen so badly, the skin on the back of his hands were dark but also appeared light, not a single trace of wrinkle. It was like inflated pig urine foam. He saw that it became more swollen, he thought his skin would definitely crack and shouted: "I will go with you! It... it can't be delayed." He stuffed the sword manual in his bosom and rushed out of the room to catch up with Wan Gui.

Qi Fang heard the two of them were quite far away and urgently crawled out from under the bed. She mused: Where should I go now?" At this time she was completely out of her wits, she thought the world was so boundless yet there wasn't a single safe haven for her. "They killed my father, how can I not take my revenge? But how do I go about taking action? In terms of martial arts and intelligence, I am much inferior to father-in-law or San'ge. Besides, they believe that I have an affair with Wu Kan. As soon as they see me they will kill me, how can I resist? The only thing to do is to... to find martial brother and then decide. But how would I know where he is? What about Water

Spinach? How can I just leave her behind?" As soon as she thought about her daughter, she sped up her pace and rushed to the back building. She intended to take her daughter to escape with her, then come up with a plan for revenge.

In her heart, she still could not completely believe that it was the Wan family who caused the death of her father. Wan Zhenshan was a vicious and merciless person, but what about Wan Gui? She was very tender and sweet to her husband, she could not simply just suddenly sever all ties with him.

She rushed to the first floor and heard Wan Zhenshan's coarse voice shouting and crying. She thought: "If he keeps yelling like this, he will wake up Water Spinach!" As soon as she thought that her daughter may be scared, she could not simply just worry about her own safety. She swiftly went upstairs, careful not to emit any noises from the staircase. Water Spinach slept in a room behind where she and her husband slept, it was separated only by a thin layer of metal sheet. Qi Fang slipped into the small room. The room was lighted inside, she saw that her daughter had awoken a long time ago, her face full of fright. As soon as she saw her mother, her mouth was flat as if she was about to cry. Qi Fang hurriedly rushed forward to pick her up. She made a gesture with her hands to signal her daughter not to make any noises. Water Spinach was smart and obedient, and she did not make a single sound. Qi Fang embraced her daughter and reclined on the bed.

The voice of Wan Zhenshan was heard. "No good, this is no good. The more I use this painkiller the more pain I feel. We must find the physician and use his antidote, it's the only way."

Wan Gui said: "Yes, only that antidote is capable of curing this poison. As soon as the sky turns bright I will ask Brother Lu and the others to set out to search for him. The wound on the back of my hand is in great pain too."

Wan Zhenshan scolded: "How can we wait until morning!? Ah.. Ah! I can't take it! I can't take it!" All of a sudden his legs became numb and he collapsed on the floor. He was in so much pain he began rolling on the ground. He shouted: "Quick! Get the sword, cut off my hands! Cut off my hands!" Qi Fang heard as the sounds of various furniture inside the room crashed and banged across the room, the vases and bowls clanged against each other and shattered on the floor.

Water Spinach was so scared she hugged her mother with all her might, her face deathly pale. Qi Fang gently comforted her with her hands and did not dare to make a noise.

Wan Gui was deeply troubled and panicked. "Father, you... you must endure a bit longer. How can I cut your hands off? We must find the antidote."

Wan Zhenshan was in so much pain he simply could not take it anymore. "Why won't you cut off my hands and relieve me of my pain? Ah, I know, you... you want me to die, then you can take the manual and find the treasure yourself..."

Wan Gui reprimanded: "Father, you are in so much pain you mind is unclear. Quickly rest on the bed. I don't even know the sequence of the sword stances, what use do I have for the sword manual?"

Wan Zhenshan constantly rolled on the floor. "You say I am unclear, I say you have malicious intentions. I... I am in so much pain I am about to die... I am about to die... I will make sure neither of us gets the treasure!"

Suddenly both his eyes turned red, he pulled out the sword manual from his bosom and extended his hands to rip out the pages. All ten of his fingers were swollen like roots of red carrots, he could barely move them, but he still managed to rip out a few pages.

Wan Gui was startled. “Don’t tear it! Don’t tear it!” He extended his hands to take the manual away. He took hold of half the manual while Wan Zhenshan held the other half, unwilling to release his grip. Wan Gui was blank for a moment and Wan Zhenshan took the opportunity to pull. Wan Gui was unwilling to let go of the treasure that he had right in front of him turn into passing mist, so he hurriedly extended his hands to push away his father. The two of them were on the ground stealing and seizing, rolling and flipping about on the floor. The manual became even more torn.

All of a sudden Wan Gui screamed loudly: “Ah... damn it!... my wound has contracted poison again. Ah! It hurts so much!” The two of them pulled and dragged on the manual, the poison smeared on the sword manual had once again seeped into Wan Gui’s original wound on the back of his hand. In an instant, Wan Gui’s hand was swollen again, the pain shook his heart and pierced into his bones. Since he had been sick, his endurance was weak, as soon as the poison went into his wound, it immediately followed the circulation of blood and flared out remarkably fast. The two of them rolled on the floor shouting and screaming in pain.

Qi Fang listened for a bit longer; after all they were husband and wife, she could not simply just ignore his cries. She got up from the bed and walked in front of the room and said coldly, “What’s going on? What are you two doing?”

The two of them saw Qi Fang, but under such excruciating pain they did not have the time to be angry. Wan Gui cried: “Fang’mei, quickly find the physician, tell him to make the antidote, ah... ah... I really... I really can’t take it anymore. Please... I beg you...”

When Qi Fang saw he was in so much pain that his head was covered in sweat, her heart softened even more. From her bosom she took out the bottle and said: “This is the antidote!”

Wan Zhenshan and Wan Gui both saw the antidote, the both of them crawled forward at the same time and shouted: “Excellent! Excellent! Quick, quickly apply it on me!”

Qi Fang saw Wan Zhenshan’s eyes were fierce and malicious and greedy like a wild beast. She thought that she could take this opportunity to threaten him, she could find out the truth. She said: “Not so fast, don’t move! If any one of you make a move, I will toss this antidote out the window into the water. Both of you will die!” As she said this she opened the window and unscrewed the porcelain bottle. She suspended the bottle of antidote by the window. All she would have to do is lightly shake her hand and the bottle would fall into water, rendered completely ineffective.

The two Wans stopped moving instantly. They looked at each other, at a loss for words. Wan Zhenshan said: “My good daughter-in-law, if you give me the antidote, I will let you run away with Wu Kan. I will not pursue you. I will even give you a thousand taels of silver for the two of you to spend on your journey... ah, it hurts... since you have the heart and he has the feelings, Gui’er cannot keep you here... you are free to leave.”

Qi Fang thought: “This person is truly shameless and despicable. Wu Kan was strangled to death by his own hands, yet he is actually lying to me right now.”

Wan Gui said: "Fang'mei, although I cannot bear to part with you, there is no other way. I promise I will not make things difficult for Wu Kan."

Qi Fang laughed coldly and said: "The two of you are completely muddleheaded. You still harbour such and vile and repulsive desire. I am only going to ask you one thing. If you two answer me honestly, I will hand over the antidote."

Wan Zhenshan said: "Right! Right! Ask away! Ayo! Ayo!"

A breeze of wind came from outside through the window, it blew the various paper and butterfly figures dancing on the ground. The fragments of paper were from the torn from the sword manual, and thin slices flew out the window. All of a sudden, a pair of colourful butterflies flew up, it was the butterfly cut out that she made that year that was placed in the middle of the book. The two paper butterflies began dancing around the room swiftly and followed the wind out of the window. Qi Fang felt her heart sour as she recalled the happy moments she spent with Di Yun that day back in the cave. How lovely the world was back then, in all of heaven and earth there wasn't a thing that she was unhappy about.

Wan Gui rapidly urged: "Ask away! What is it? There is nothing I won't say."

Qi Fang trembled slightly then asked: "Where is my father? What did you do to him?"

Wan Zhenshan forced out a laugh and said: "You ask me about your father, I—I don't know either. Ayo—I also miss my martial brother dearly—ayo! And martial brother is my in-law now, ayo! It hurts so much."

Qi Fang remained calm and collected. "Even now you are still lying to me, what's the use? My father was killed by you, am I right? You killed him with the same trick you used to kill Wu Kan, am I right? You have already stuffed his corpse inside the wall, am I right?"

Qi Fang repeatedly asked "am I right" three times, both Wans were so startled and in complete disbelief. They did not expect that not only did she know about her father's death, but she even knew about how they dealt with Wu Kan. Wan Gui trembled in his speech and said: "How... how did you know?"

When he uttered the words "how did you know?" it was basically confirming everything that she said. Qi Fang's heart turned sour and her rage shot through the roof. At once she wanted to release her hold on the bottle of antidote and let it fall out the window into the water outside. Wan Gui saw that the situation was urgent and wanted to pounce himself forward to take it. Wan Zhenshan scolded: "Gui'er, don't act rashly!" He knew that in such a circumstance, trying to force things to happen would only make matters worse.

All of a sudden, collapsing footsteps were heard, Water Spinach walked towards them from her room with her bare feet. She shouted: "Mama! Mama!" She wanted to pounce herself to be embraced by her mother.

Wan Gui came up with a bright idea. He extended his left arm, catching her daughter half way as she ran across the room. With his right hand he took out a dagger and aimed directly at the top of her

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daughter's head and scolded: "Very well, it looks like our family, both old and young, will perish tonight! I will kill Water Spinach first, then talk!"

Qi Fang was extremely startled and urgently said: "Release her now! What does this have to do with our daughter?"

Wan Gui said in a severe tone, "Since none of us will come out alive, I might as well kill Water Spinach first!" The dagger was hovering slightly above Water Spinach's head. Wan Gui made a few gestures of fake stabbing in the air, aiming at the direction on top of her head.

Qi Fang shouted, "No! No!" She rushed forward to rescue her daughter and extended her hand to grab Wan Gui by the wrist.

Although Wan Zhenshan was in so much pain, after all he was very experienced. When he saw his son lure Qi Fang over, at once he thrust his elbow forward and hit her hard on the waist. Then with both hands he reached to grab the bottle that she was holding and poured the powder on the back of his hand. Wan Gui also extended his hands for the antidote. Qi Fang rushed forward for her daughter and embraced her tightly.

With a flying kick, Wan Zhenshan knocked Qi Fang down on the ground. Then he followed to untie his belt and tied Qi Fang's hands behind her back. He also tied both her legs. Qi Fang exclaimed: "Mama! Mama!" Wan Zhenshan flipped his hand to smack her so hard that she passed out. But this slap hit himself hard on his wound and he let out another "Ayo!"

The antidote was really remarkable and effective. After the two of them applied it, in a short period of time blood began to seep out of their wounds and their pain slowly reduced and turned into numbness and itchiness. After some more time, the numbness and itchiness also reduced. Both father and son became relieved and knew their lives were saved. They saw the various fragments of paper flying out the window and gasped, "Uh oh!" and pounced themselves forward to grab the pieces of paper dancing around.

But the pieces of paper on the ground had been completely scattered, more than half of it had already flown out the window, spiralling above the water. Wan Zhenshan shouted: "Quick, quick! Get it!" The two of them rushed downstairs and with all their efforts grabbed the various fragments of paper flying about with the wind. But there were several hundreds of pieces scattered, fluttering about in the wind that blew out the enclosure. Some blew very high up the sky, the two of them rushed east and west, appearing demented, but how was it possible for them to collect all the fragments, let alone put together the sword manual back in its original form?

Although the pain at the back of Wan Zhenshan's hands had reduced greatly, the pain in his heart was indescribable and he could not repress his anger. He vented: "It is all your fault! Why did you fight over the manual with me? If you did not try to take it from me, how would the manual be torn?"

Wan Gui sighed and did not further pursue the fragments. "If your son did not try to take it away, father would have already torn the manual to shreds."

Wan Zhenshan replied: "Bullshit!" In his heart he knew that his son was speaking the truth, but he could not help but say, "Bullshit! Bullshit! Bullshit!"

Wan Gui said: "Fortunately, we know that it is located somewhere south of Jiangling. Once we search further into the bits and fragments of the sword manual, we may be able to find more clues, it is not necessarily the case that we won't find the treasure."

Wan Zhenshan became more alert when he heard this. "You are right, it is in 'Jiangling City, South'..."

All of a sudden from outside the wall a voice softly repeated: "Jiangling City, South!"

The two Wans were taken aback. They jumped over the wall and looked outwards. They saw the back of two people making their way to a small alley.

Wan Gui scolded: "Bu Yuan, Shen Cheng, don't move!"

The two of them did not turn their heads around, nor did they stop moving. In fact they began to run even faster. Wan Zhenshan quickly lowered himself from the wall and made chase. Wan Gui said: "Father, the... the whore is still upstairs."

Wan Zhenshan changed his mind and nodded in agreement.

The two of them made their way back upstairs. They saw that the little girl Water Spinach had already woken up and was hugging her mother and crying. Qi Fang's hands and legs were tied so she was unable to comfort her daughter. Water Spinach saw that her grandfather was coming back and let out a "Wah!" and began to cry even louder.

Wan Zhenshan ran forward and kicked her from behind, scolding: "If you cry anymore I am going to cut open your stomach!"

Water Spinach was so scared that she turned deathly pale, she did not dare to make any more noise.

Wan Gui said softly: "Father, that whore knows everything. We can't let her live, how shall we deal with her?"

Wan Zhenshan muttered to himself then said: "Those two people outside just now, you saw clearly it was Bu Yuan and Shen Cheng?"

Wan Gui said: "It is definitely those two, I can't be wrong! I'm afraid that the secret is leaked and they both know the treasure is in Jiangling."

Wan Zhenshan said: "We can't waste any more time then, we will take action now. We will deal with this whore the same way we dealt with her father."

Qi Fang had long cast away her life, but she could not bear to part from her daughter. "San... San'ge, you and I are a couple after all, I don't mind if you kill me, but after I die, please take good care of Water Spinach!"

Wan Gui said: "Very well!"

## Chapter 11 – Building a Wall

Wan Zhenshan said: “We must cut the weeds and eliminate the roots, how can we let her offspring remain in this world? This little girl is intelligent and erratic, she saw everything that happened today. How can we be sure that she won’t leak this information to outsiders?”

Wan Gui faintly nodded his head. He really loved his daughter dearly, but his father also spoke true words, if he were to keep her alive there could be extremely severe consequences.

Qi Fang began to cry from both eyes, her voice choking with sobs. “You... you are very cruel, you won’t even... even spare a little girl?”

Wan Zhenshan said: “Stuff something in her mouth, don’t let her speak. If she screams the whole world will know about it!”

Qi Fang remembered how her daughter’s life was in jeopardy. At once she raised her voice and yelled at the top of her lungs, “Help! Help!”

In the stillness of the night, these two screams of “Help!” pierced across the empty sky and travelled far into the distance.

Wan Gui pounced himself forward and covered her mouth with his hands. Qi Fang continued to yell, “Help! Help!” but because her mouth was covered, her voice was greatly reduced. Wan Zhenshan tore a portion of his son’s long robe and passed it to him. Wan Gui immediately stuck this piece of garment in her mouth.

Wan Zhenshan said: “Bury her in the same place we buried Qi Zhangfa. Father and daughter will share the same burial place, excellent!”

Wan Gui nodded his head and picked up his wife, taking big strides as he made his way downstairs. Wan Zhenshan carried Water Spinach. The four of them made their way to the study room.

Qi Fang looked at the white wall on the west side of the room and thought: “So that old thief stuffed my father inside the hole in this wall?”

Wan Zhenshan said: “I will break the wall now, bring Wu Kan here! Be careful not to let anyone see you.”

Wan Gui replied: “Yes!” and rushed over to Wan Zhenshan’s bedroom.

Wan Zhenshan pulled apart drawer in the desks, including the chisel, hammer, and spade knives and other sort of equipment, every variety imaginable. He took them all out and placed it beside the wall. He looked at the white wall for a moment before rubbing it with both hands. Then he turned his head to look at Qi Fang, his appearance looking extremely complacent. Qi Fang could not help but shiver at his gaze. Wan Zhenshan picked up the iron hammer and chisel, and after looking at the correct position in the wall, he stuffed the chisel at a crack between two bricks. The chisel cracked one of the bricks in the wall. He extended his hand to shake it a few times and pulled the brick out. It appeared that he was very familiar with this procedure. After he took out the brick, he sniffed it a few times with his nose.



When Qi Fang saw the way Wan Zhenshan took out the bricks, she recalled how he saw him to the same thing during his dreams, digging bricks, pushing out corpses, building walls, the entire procedure. She was so scared that she trembled all over. When he saw how he was sniffing the brick that held her father captive for the odour of a corpse, she was even more afraid and saddened. She was also very angry. She abused roundly, "You traitor! You shameless old thief!" But because her mouth was stuffed, she could only make out faint mumbling sounds.

Wan Zhenshan reached for the second brick when suddenly the sound of urgent footsteps fast approached, Wan Gui entered and said: "Father! This is not good, Wu Kan... Wu Kan..." His body crashed against the edge of the table and choked on himself, then the oil lamp fell on the ground and the entire room was completely dark. There was nothing left but a very faint moonlight piercing through the window paper.

Wan Zhenshan asked: "What about Wu Kan? You make such a big fuss about nothing. How can you lose your cool so easily?"

Wan Gui exclaimed: "Wu Kan has disappeared!"

Wan Zhenshan scolded: "Bullshit! How can he disappear?" But his voice trembled, it was obvious that he fear was flourishing in his heart. With a loud clap, the brick that he held on his hands dropped on the ground.

Wan Gui said: "I extended my hands to reach under the bed where you placed the body, but there was nothing there. I lit the oil lamp and shined it under the bed, but the body had disappeared without a trace. I searched thoroughly throughout the room... the back of boxes, tables... I searched everywhere, but I could not find anything."

Wan Zhenshan muttered to himself irresolutely. "That... that is very strange. It must be Bu Yuan and Shen Cheng who are playing tricks on us."

Wan Gui said: "Father, could it be... could it be that Wu Kan was not completely dead? Maybe he temporarily sealed his breathing and then came back to life?"

Wan Zhenshan scolded: "Bullshit! Your father's nickname is 'Five Cloud Hand', how proficient am I with my hands? Do you think I can't even kill a mere disciple?"

Wan Gui said: "That's true, it is logical that Wu Kan was definitely killed by father, but why is it that his corpse has disappeared? Could it be that his departed spirit is demanding vengeance for grievances..."

Wan Zhenshan scolded: "Don't let your imagination run wild! Let's deal with the whore and little demon quickly, then we will find Wu Kan's body. I'm afraid that if this incident gets known to the public, it will be hard for us father-and-son to find a safe haven in Jingzhou..." After he said this he increased his pace to take out all the bricks. In his dreams he had already practiced this procedure extremely thoroughly, and now when actually doing it he was very proficient, even without a light source his movements were fast and nimble.

Wan Gui answered, "Yes!" and with knife in hand, he walked in front of Qi Fang and trembled as he said: "Fang'mei, you wronged me first. After you die, you cannot blame me!"

## Chapter 11 – Building a Wall

Qi Fang was speechless. She turned her body and rammed him hard with her shoulder. She had nothing to complain about the Wans wanting to kill her, but to even go so far as to kill Water Spinach, such people with the heart of a wolf and lungs of a dog were truly hard to come by in this world.

Wan Gui was rammed by her shoulder and got knocked back several steps. He raised his sabre and shouted: “Little whore! You are at the verge of death and still dare to play rough with me!”

At this time, footsteps were suddenly heard approaching. The door in the study room slowly creaked open. Wan Gui was startled and he turned his head to look. In the dimness of the moonlight, he could only see that the door was open, but nobody was there.

Wan Zhenshan shouted: “Who is it?”

The door creaked a few more times, but nobody responded.

In the glimmer of light, it could be made that someone suddenly jumped inside the room. This person jumped forward several times in succession, his body straight and his knees not curving the slightest. Wan Zhenshan and Wan Gui were both startled by this, and they could not help but retreat two steps each. They saw that this person had their eyes wide open, his tongue sticking out, and his nose and mouth were covered in blood—it was none other than Wu Kan.

Wan Zhenshan and Wan Gui both shouted, “Ah!” When Qi Fang saw such a frightening sight, she too was so scared that her heart nearly stopped beating. Water Spinach was so scared that she stuffed her head in her mother’s bosom and did not dare to make a noise. Wu Kan did not move in the slightest, both his arms slowly raised up and extended forward to reach for Wan Zhenshan.

Wan Zhenshan scolded: “Wu Kan you little thief, you think your daddy I will be afraid... afraid of your zombie?” At once he took out his sabre and aimed to crack open Wu Kan’s head. However, he suddenly felt both his wrists were numb, he could not even grasp his sabre properly, and with a loud clank it fell on the ground. Then followed that his waist felt numb, and his entire body could not move in the least bit.

Wan Gui was already so scared that his entire body was paralyzed. Now upon seeing what Wu Kan’s zombie did to his father, it then followed that the zombie extended both hands to grab him slowly. He wanted to shout: “Brother Wu! Brother Wu! Forgive me!” But his voice was clogged in his throat and he could not even yell out no matter how hard he tried. He retreated two steps; his legs became numb and collapsed on the floor. Then he saw Wu Kan’s right arm drooping down, feeling his face, its fingers cold as death without any hint of warmth. Wan Gui was so scared that he completely lost his soul and passed out at once.

All of a sudden, Wu Kan’s body pushed forward and pounced itself on Wan Gui’s body, completely lifeless. There was someone standing behind Wu Kan.

This person walked beside Qi Fang and took out the ragged garment that was stuffed in her mouth. With both hands this person pulled and easily broke the rope the cord that tied around her arms and legs. Then this person turned around and kicked Wan Gui hardly on the waist. The internal energy of this kick was so profound that Wan Gui felt pain all over his body.

Qi Fang picked up Water Spinach then trembled and said: "May I ask for the name of benefactor who saved my life?"

This person's hands extended forward. Under the moonlight one could make out that in each palm there was a cut out of a butterfly. It was the butterfly cut out that was placed between the pages of the manual. This person caught these cut outs as it was flying out the window.

Qi Fang glanced at these butterflies and saw that this person's right hand was missing all five fingers. She almost lost her voice as she called out, "Brother Di!"

This person was indeed Di Yun. When he suddenly heard Qi Fang call out "Brother Di!" his heart was filled with an indescribable warmth. Tears began to fall from his eyes as he called out, "Fang'mei! Heaven has pity, you... you and I can finally see each other again!"

At this point, Qi Fang was like a small boat drifting along the vastness of the great ocean. Under the compounded effects of fierce winds and torrential rain, she miraculously found a tranquil harbour where the breeze was calm and the waves were quiet. She pounced herself to be embraced by Di Yun and said: "Martial brother, this... this... this... is this a dream?"

Di Yun said: "This is not a dream. Fang'mei, for the last two nights I have kept watch around here. I have witnessed everything those two have done. In regards to Wu Kan's body, I was the one who took it out to scare them!"

Qi Fang shouted: "Father! Father!" She placed Water Spinach down and rushed in front of the opening on the wall. She extended her hand to feel the insides but there was nothing there. She let out an "Ah" and softly said: "There... there is nothing!"

Di Yun lit the oil lamp and illuminated the opening in the wall. He saw that between the walls there was nothing but lime plaster and bricks, where could one find the body of Qi Zhangfa? He said: "There is nothing there, nothing at all."

Qi Fang took a candle from Wan Zhenshan's bed and lit it from Di Yun's light, then raised the candle and looked closely at the cracks between the bricks. Where could one find Qi Zhangfa's body, or anyone's body? She was both startled and delighted, for she now had a string of hope in her heart. "It could be that father was never killed by them." She turned around to look at Wan Gui and said: "San... San'ge, where is my father?"

Wan Gui and Wan Zhenshan did not realize that she did not find the body inside the wall. They thought that she saw her father's corpse and wanted to take revenge. Wan Zhenshan remained upright and unafraid, he said: "A gentleman bears the full consequences of his own actions. I was the one who killed Qi Zhangfa, if you want to take revenge you can kill me."

Qi Fang said: "Father was really killed by you? Then... where is his body?"

Wan Zhenshan said: "What's that? Does the dead body inside the wall not belong to him?"

Qi Fang said: "Where is there a dead body?"

Wan Zhenshan and Wan Gui looked at each other in dismay, their faces deathly pale, they could not believe it. Di Yun picked up Wan Zhenshan and pushed him forward to stick his head inside the wall to take a look.

Wan Zhenshan trembled and said: “In this world there really... really exists a zombie that can walk? I definitely... definitely...” Then immediately he changed his words. “My good daughter-in-law, I... I deceived you. Although my martial brother and I are not on good terms, I would not go so far as to kill him, why would you believe that’s what actually happened? Haha! Haha!” Usually he was pretty good at telling lies, but at this point he was so startled and afraid his words were all over the place and weren’t even remotely believable. If he insisted on continuing his lie, perhaps Qi Fang and Di Yun would carry a very small glimmer of hope, but with the way he spoke, it only served to further confirm that he was the one who killed Qi Zhangfa.

Di Yun extended his hand forward to reach for Wan Zhenshan’s shoulder and said: “Uncle Wan, you have caused me so much grief. I will not settle the score with you now, but I only ask you: Did you kill my teacher or not?” As he said this he utilized the internal energy of the Heavenly Glow. In an instant, Wan Zhenshan felt as if his entire body fell into a large fiery furnace, it felt that even his blood was burning so hard it was about to boil. He was in so much pain, and when he further thought about how Qi Zhangfa’s body disappeared without a trace, he became even more frightened and alarmed. His thoughts were all over the place and did not dare to resist his opponent. “That... that is correct. I was the one who killed Qi Zhangfa.”

Di Yun asked, “Where is my teacher’s body? Where did you put him?”

Wan Zhenshan said: “I really did stuff him inside the wall, his body has changed... changed into a zombie?”

Di Yun glared at him violently. He recalled all the vast and endless pain and grief he suffered throughout the years, it was all because of him and his son. And now that Wan Zhenshan had just admitted that he was the one who killed his teacher, how could he not be in raging fury? If he had not just reunited with Qi Fang which caused his heart to be filled with more happiness than bereavement, he would have instantly killed this person with one palm strike. He clenched his teeth and picked up Wan Zhenshan. Wan Zhenshan was a big person and the hole in the wall was small, several bricks had to be knocked down before he was able to stuff his body inside.

Qi Fang let out an “ah” and cried out lightly. Then Di Yun picked up Wan Gui’s body and also stuffed it inside the hole and said: “One revenge follows another, the two of them father-and-son killed my teacher in such a way, now we will deal with them in the exact same way.” He picked up the loose bricks on the ground and began to stick it back in the wall. In no time at all, the wall was completely sealed up again.

Qi Fang trembled and said: “Martial... martial brother, you have finally avenged my father’s death. If not for you... martial brother, what should we do with this person’s body?” As she said this, she pointed at Wu Kan’s corpse on the ground.

Di Yun said: “We should leave now! We don’t need to care about anything that happens here anymore.”

Qi Fang said: "The two of them are stuffed inside the wall but they aren't dead yet. What if someone saves them..."

Di Yun said: "How would others know that there would be someone inside a wall? We will take Wu Kan's body outside for others to see, then nobody would even think about coming in here to investigate. The two of them can't live inside the wall for very long." At once he lifted up Wu Kan's body and threw it out of the study room. Then he made a hand gesture at Qi Fang and said: "Let's go!"

The two of them rushed out of the enclosure of the Wan residence. Di Yun let go of Wu Kan's body and said: "Martial sister, where should we go now?"

Qi Fang said: "You think my father was really killed by those two?"

Di Yun said: "Hopefully teacher is still alive, but judging from what Wan Zhenshan said, I'm afraid that... that teacher has already ran into misfortune. But we should investigate and seek out the truth."

Qi Fang said: "I have to go back and get something. Wait for me near that ruined memorial hall."

Di Yun said: "I will go with you."

Qi Fang said: "No, that is not good! If anyone sees us, that will cause for some trouble."

Di Yun said: "It is best if I stay with you. There is not a single good person amongst Wan Zhenshan's disciples."

Qi Fang said: "It's not a problem, hold Water Spinach and wait for me."

Water Spinach was so frightened by the events that had just occurred that she had long fainted and slept under her mother's embracement.

Di Yun usually listened to Qi Fang's instructions. When he saw that she was determined, he did not dare to disobey her. He could only take hold of her daughter and watch as Qi Fang once again went inside the Wan family, entering through the memorial hall and pushed the door inside.

After the time it took to eat a meal had passed, Qi Fang still did not return. Di Yun became anxious and wanted to go inside to look for her. But he was afraid that she would be unhappy, so he only carried Water Spinach and walked back and forth around the corridor. He thought about how he finally reunited with his martial sister after all this time, it was really a feeling of joy that he could not describe. But in the most inner depths of his heart he felt an indistinct sense of fear, would his martial sister stay with him forever? He constantly wished in his heart, "Heaven please bless and protect us, I have already suffered endless tragedies, I wish that I can spend the rest of my days with her, to protect her and to take good care of her. I do not dare to become her husband, I only hope that I can see her every day, and that every day she would call me once 'martial brother'. Heaven, in my entire life I will never ask you for anything ever again."

All of a sudden, there was a rustling noise coming out from the window in the memorial hall, it appeared that there was someone there. Di Yun turned his body and stood near the window without moving. After a while, the long window creaked open as someone came outside.

In the darkness Di Yun could faintly make out that this person had messy hair draping over her shoulders, it was a beggar woman. Di Yun did not pay much attention to her and only thought: "Why has Fang'mei not come out yet after so much time?"

Water Spinach began to cry out in her sleep, she was so scared that she cried out: "Mama! Mama!"

The beggar woman was taken aback. She withdrew to the corner of the corridor and hugged her own head. Di Yun lightly tapped Water Spinach on the shoulder and said: "Don't cry, don't cry! Is mama here yet? Is mama here yet?"

The beggar woman listened and made out that a little girl was screaming; Di Yun appeared to have no intention of harming her in the least bit. She mustered up her courage and got up to slowly walk forward, helping him console Water Spinach. "My darling is a good girl, your mama will come out soon!" She spoke softly to Di Yun, "A person will see ghosts at night, someone will build walls in the middle of the night, no... no... don't ask me about it..."

Di Yun asked, "What are you talking about?"

The beggar woman said: "No... nothing. Master kicked me out of the house, he doesn't want me anymore. Once upon a time I was young and beautiful, he liked me very much. As the saying goes, a day of man and wife is worth a hundred nights of grace, a hundred nights of grace is deeper than the ocean... Master will one day ask me to return, I know it. A night of man and wife is worth a hundred nights of grace, a hundred nights of grace is deeper than the ocean..."

Di Yun was startled and thought: "Martial sister and her husband, would she not care about her old affection?" All of a sudden it felt as if his chest was clogged and could not breathe. He felt a bit dizzy and carried Water Spinach closely. Then he rushed inside through the memorial hall.

He never would have guessed that the beggar woman just now was in fact Tao Hong, the same beautiful lady who framed him that year.

## Chapter 12 – Liancheng Treasure



*Various pearls, gemstones, white jades, green jades fell on the ground. All of the heroic people of the realm and soldiers reached to grab the treasure at all costs. Some began to fight each other, others even jumped on the Gold Buddha...*

Di Yun jumped over the outer wall and made his way to the Wan family's study room. At this point it was about daybreak, under the haziness of the light he could see someone was lying on the ground. This person vaguely looked like Qi Fang. Di Yun was startled, immediately he took the fire knife and the flint to light a fire and lit it on the candle on top of the table. Under the candlelight he saw that Qi Fang's body was completely covered in blood, there was a short knife stabbed on her lower stomach.

There were piles of bricks all around her, the wall had cracked open and the two Wans were nowhere to be seen.

Di Yun knelt down beside Qi Fang and shouted: "Martial sister! Martial sister!" He was so scared that he trembled throughout his whole body. His voice was nearly inaudible. He extended his hands to reach for Qi Fang's face, he felt that there was still some warmth and there was very faint breathing in her nose. He calmed himself and called out again, "Martial sister!"

Qi Fang slowly opened her eyes. She revealed a very bitter smile on her face and said: "Martial brother... I... I'm sorry."

Di Yun said: "You don't have to say anything, I... I'm here to save you." He gently put Water Spinach on the side then with his right hand he reached for Qi Fang's body. With his left hand he picked up the short knife by its handle and wanted to pull it out, but after a glimpse he saw that the knife was stuck really deep in her stomach. If he were to pull it out, she would definitely lose her life at once, so he did not dare to act rashly. He was urgent but was completely powerless at this situation. He did not know what to do and asked: "What can I do? What can I do? Who... who did this to you?"

Qi Fang smiled bitterly and said: "Martial brother, as the saying goes, a night of man and wife... ai, I won't say it, I... please don't fault me. I could not bear it in my heart, I let my husband out, he... he... he..."

Di Yun clenched his teeth and said: "He... he... he stabbed you with a knife, is that right?"

Qi Fang smiled bitterly and nodded her head.

Di Yun was in so much emotional pain that it felt as if the knife was stabbed in his own heart. He could do nothing but watch as Qi Fang's life was hanging by a thread. Wan Gui's strike stabbed into her very deeply, no matter what she could not be saved. In his heart there was a faint hint of a jealous snake gnawing at his insides as he said: "You... you really do love your husband. You are willing to save him at the expense of your own life."

Qi Fang said: "Martial brother, promise me, take good care of Water Spinach. Treat her like your own... your own daughter."

Di Yun did not respond and nodded his head. Then he said: "That little thief... where did he go?"

Qi Fang's expressions were messy and her voice was ambiguous, she softly said: "From that cave, the two big butterflies flew in here. Liang Shanbo, Zhu Yingtai, martial brother, look, look! One of them is you, the other is me. We will... we will fly together, hither and thither, just like that. We will never separate, what do you say?" Her voice was barely audible, her breathing became more faint and weak until it came to a full stop.



Di Yun carried Water Spinach on one hand while he carried Qi Fang's body with the other. He jumped out from the enclosure of the Wan residence. At first he wanted to set the Wan residence completely on fire with one torch, but he changed his mind and thought: "If I burn down this house, the Wans will never come back again. If I want to avenge martial sister, I'd better leave this place intact."

Di Yun made his way to the abandoned garden that he stayed in with Ding Dian that year. He walked under the plum tree and dug a hole and placed Qi Fang inside. He kept the short sabre with him. He intended to use this short sabre to take the lives of both Wan Gui and his father.

He was in so much grief that he could not even cry out. All he could do was fault himself. "Why didn't I just kill those two villains and then seal the wall? Why was I so careless as to cause martial sister to lose her life?" He did not fault her martial sister, he only faulted his own actions.

Water Spinach kept crying "Mama! Mama!" she cried so loud that Di Yun was distraught with anxiety. Thereupon he found a peasant family outside Jiangling and gave them ten taels of silver to the couple to look after the little girl.

Day and night he camped outside the Wan residence. Half a month passed. He did not see any trace of the Wan family. The strange part was that even Lu Kun, Bu Yuan, Sun Jun, Feng Tan, and Shen Cheng had disappeared completely, never returning to the Wan residence. The remaining servants in the Wan family became like a housefly without a head, some began to steal things while others began to fight and argue with each other.

Inside Jiangling City there were many characters from the martial world who assembled from all directions.

One night, Di Yun heard the conversation of several grand characters from the realm:

"It turns out that A Deadly Secret is hidden inside a 'Tang Poem Anthology'. The first four words are 'Jiangling City, South'."

"That is correct, these past few days the wind has sure blown quite a few people here after hearing this news. Except that nobody knows what follows after those four words."

"Who cares what follows afterwards? All we have to do is camp south of the city. As soon as someone digs out the treasure, we will impede their path and rob them."

"Correct, even if we can't rob the whole thing, we will at least get a small portion. Anyone who sees it will take it, how will we be missing out?"

"Haha! In the past few days, many people have bought the 'Tang Poem Anthology' from the local bookstore in Jiangling. Today I walked by the bookstore and before I even said a word the shopkeeper asked me: 'Elder, are you here to buy the Tang Poem Anthology? This book we have just imported from Hankou, if you want to buy it come early. If you come late it will be sold out.' I was very curious so I asked him, 'How do you know I wanted to buy the Tang Poem Anthology?' What do you think he answered?"

“I don’t know! What did he say?”

“Damn it! That shopkeeper said: ‘I will not hide the truth from you, elder. Several days ago there were many folks who wielded swords and sabres, sticking out their chest and belly in a shocking manner. They all came to the bookstore, whether it was 10 or 11 people, they all wanted to buy this book. I sold them for five taels of silver each, do you want that book too?’”

“Damn it! How can a book be so expensive?”

“Do you know how much the book is worth? Have you looked at its contents?”

“Haha, your daddy I have never entered a bookstore my entire life. Books... books, your daddy I am a gambler, I only buy something that will let me win, why would I buy a book<sup>1</sup>? Haha! Haha!”

Di Yun thought: “It looks like the secret of the Liancheng Manual has leaked out. I wonder who leaked it out? Right, the exchange between the Wan Zhenshan and his son was heard by Lu Kun and the others. Wan Zhenshan wanted to investigate, and his several disciples escaped as well. In such a way, the news spread and more and more people knew about it.”

He recalled how during the years he spent in prison with Ding Dian, there would often be realm folks who came, but they were all effortlessly killed by Ding Dian. “Hmm, I have not fulfilled Brother Ding’s wish yet. Brother Ding’s business is even more important than my own affairs of vengeance.”

Lady Ling’s father was the prefectural magistrate of the Jiangling Prefecture. Di Yun made his way to the largest coffin store and largest tombstone store in Jiangling to investigate. He found out that Lady Ling was buried on top of a small hill about twelve li east of the city.

He bought an iron shovel and a crane-mouth hoe and made his way eastwards. It did not take him very long to find the tomb. On the tombstone was written the seven words “Resting place of beloved daughter Ling Shuanghua”. There were no flowers or trees in front of the tomb. During her life, Ling Shuanghua loved fresh flowers the most, yet her father did not even place any on her tomb.

“Beloved daughter... beloved daughter... haha! Do you really love your daughter?” He laughed coldly and then he thought about Ding Dian and Qi Fang. He could not help but cry, tears falling from his eyes.

His lapel had long been wet throughout from Qi Fang’s tears, now in front of the tomb of Ling Shuanghua, he added another layer of tears.

Nobody lived near this small hill, and it was distanced very far from the main road, so nobody would ever come here. But no matter what he could not dig out her tomb in the light of day. He waited until the sky was completely dark before he began digging at the grave. He dug open the large rock that was sealed by concrete mortar and the coffin was revealed.

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<sup>1</sup> The word “book” is pronounced the same as the word “lose” in Chinese. So he would not buy any books because he does not want to “lose” when he gambles.

After experiencing several years of distress and misery, Di Yun was no longer a person who would easily cry or be overcome with grief. But seeing the coffin under such gloomy moonlight, he thought about how Brother Ding died because of this very coffin, he could not help but become sad. He could not help but become teary again.

Ling Tuisi had once smeared the coffin with the poison of the "Golden Ripple Flower", but after so much time had passed and the fact that the coffin was taken all the way here to be buried, it was expected that the poison had long been wiped off. But nonetheless, Di Yun did not dare to extend his hands to touch the coffin. He took out his blood sabre and slightly shoved it in the opening between the coffin and case. The blood sabre was capable of scraping gold and slicing jades, as soon as it made contact with the coffin, it was like slicing tofu. He did not even need to use any strength and the tenon on the cover of the coffin was already cut off. He exerted some strength on his right arm until it was enough to send the cover flying out of place.

In a split second, he saw that two rotten hands were pointing upwards, but as soon as the cover flew off, the two hands drooped down again, just as if it was moving lifelike. Di Yun was slightly startled and thought: "When Lady Ling entered the coffin, how come her hands would be raised in such a way? That is very strange." He saw that there were no burial clothes or beddings inside the coffin that was typical of a burial. Lady Ling wore nothing but an unlined garment.

Di Yun silently prayed: "Brother Ding, Lady Ling, the two of you could not become man-and-wife during your lifetimes, but now you two are buried together after death, your wishes will finally be fulfilled. The two of your spirits will smile in the golden springs." He undid the burden on his back and opened it. He took out Ding Dian's ashes and scattered it completely on Lady Ling's body. He kneeled down and respectfully kowtowed four times. Then he got up and conveniently tossed the cloth wrapper that contained the ashes into the coffin. Then he sealed the coffin again.

Under the gloomy moonlight, he saw that there were some faint words written on the back of the coffin. Di Yun got closer to look and saw that these words were a trembling scrawl of writing:

*"Darling Ding, Darling Ding, in our next life we will become man and wife."*

Di Yun trembled in his heart. He sat down on the ground cross-legged. These few words were clearly written by fingernails. He only thought for a moment before he came to a realization. "Lady Ling was buried alive by her father. When she was placed in the coffin, she was not dead yet. These few words must have been written right before she died. That is also why when she died, her hands were still upwards facing the cover. It's hard to believe that in this world there could actually be such a heartless father! Brother Ding was unyielding and Lady Ling never betrayed Brother Ding. Her father became more and more ruthless and even went so far as to bury her alive." He also thought: "When Magistrate Ling realized that Brother Ding escaped from prison, he should know that Brother Ding would definitely settle the score with him, that's why he rapidly smeared the poison of the Golden Ripple Flower on the outsides of the coffin. The heart of this person is actually a hundred times more deadly than that of the Golden Ripple Flower.

He leaned closer to the coffin to take a closer look at the next two lines of writing. He saw under several words were written three lines of numbers, written "4, 41, 33, 53" and other various numbers. Di Yun inhaled a cold breath of air and thought: "Right, even before Lady Ling died, she remembered her wish of being buried together with Brother Ding. She promised Brother Ding that if there was anyone capable of burying the two of them together, she would reveal the secret of the

Liancheng Manual to this person. Brother Ding also spoke to me about these numbers in the abandoned garden, but he passed away before he finished speaking. The secret on the manual that teacher took was uncovered by martial sister's tears, but this book was then ripped to shreds by Wan Gui and his father. I only know that from now on the secret will be like passing mist, who knows the significance of the numbers written here?"

He prayed in his heart: "Lady Ling, you really are an honest person. I thank you for your kindness, but my heart is like dust, I wish for nothing more than to kill myself and bury myself beside you and Brother Ding. Just that I have not yet sought my revenge, I have not yet killed the Wan family and your father. Gold and silver mean nothing more to me than dirt or clay." After he said this, he took the cover of the coffin and was about to seal it up when suddenly a thought flashed through his mind. "Ayo! Right! I don't know where the Wans have hid themselves, it may be that for the rest of my life I won't be able to track them down. But right now the secret of the great treasure is written right in front of my eyes, and naturally the Wans will go and check it out. Right, this secret is actually a very pleasant pastry; even if the Wans were suspicious, even if they were ten times more careful, they would not be able to resist the temptation of the secret."

He placed the cover down and looked carefully at the numbers written. With the blood sabre he carved each number on the back of the shovel. After engraving all the numbers he matched it with the numbers on the coffin to make sure he did not make a mistake, then he wrapped a cloth around his hands and covered up the coffin and placed the stone slab carefully. Finally he piled the dirt around the tomb neatly.

"This desire has finally been fulfilled! After I take my revenge, I will scatter hundreds of different chrysanthemums around the tomb. Brother Ding and Lady Ling loved chrysanthemums more than anything else. It's best if I can find the 'Spring Water Jade Ripple' flower!"

Early next morning, three lines of numbers were remarkably written using calcium oxide on the west city wall of Jiangling. Every number occupied about ten feet of space and could be seen from afar. "4, 41, 33, 53..." The strange part is that these several rows of numbers were separated nearly 20 feet from the ground, it's unlikely that in Jiangling there would be such a big ladder. For someone to be capable of climbing their way up the wall to write these numbers, it would only be possible if this person tied a rope around their body and wrote it from top down.

Several hundred feet away from the numbers on the wall, Di Yun disguised himself as a beggar and took off his jacket, sitting under the sun and pretending to catch lice.

Many people entered and exited through the south city gate. In only the span of several hours, discussion erupted all throughout various markets and restaurants, they were all talking about the numbers on the wall. Many people went in front of the city gate to take a look. The position in which these numbers were written was really strange, but besides that there was nothing fancy about it. Most people would take a look, make a random guess, and then head on their way. But there were still several formidable folks from the realm who remained.

These people all held a "Tang Poem Anthology" in their hands. They copied down the numbers on the wall and creased their eyebrows in deep contemplation.

Di Yun saw Sun Jun had arrived and Shen Cheng had arrived too. After a while, Lu Kun arrived as well. But they did not know the sequence of the stances of the Liancheng Swordplay, although they

## A Deadly Secret

each had a copy of the Tang Poem Anthology, even though the numbers on the wall were written so remarkably, and even though they knew that the numbers had something to do with the secret of the manual, and even though they eavesdropped and heard their teacher and his son talk about the method to discover the secret, it was impossible for them to figure it out without knowing which number applies to which poem.

In this world, the only ones who knew the answer to this were Wan Zhenshan, Yan Daping, and Qi Zhangfa.

Lu Kun and the other three got together for a discussion. Di Yun was separated quite a distance from them and could not make out what they were saying. He only watched as the three of them discussed for a while and then returned inside the city. After some time, the three of them changed into a disguise and came out again. One disguised himself as a fruit salesman and carried a bucket of tangerines, another disguised himself as a vegetable dealer, and the third disguised himself as a local peasant carrying a shovel. The three of them camped near the city wall and watched attentively for anyone who passed by.

Di Yun knew of their intentions. They were waiting for Wan Zhenshan to appear. They could not figure out the secret of the manual, but they knew that if they followed Wan Zhenshan they would be able to find the location of the treasure. Even if they could not take the whole thing, at least they could get a portion of it. Naturally it would be extremely dangerous for them to see their teacher again, but if they wanted to become filthy rich, how could they not take such a risk?

The first four numbers of the Liancheng Manual had long been revealed to the general public. “4, 41, 33, 53” which was decoded to mean “Jiangling City, South”; even if a person was more stupid they would realize that the numbers following those four numbers would naturally reveal the location of the treasure.

More and more people came near the city wall. Some disguised themselves while others kept their everyday appearance. Di Yun counted that there were 78 people in total. After a while, Bu Yuan and Feng Tan also came. The two of them were for some reason flushed with anger, it appeared as if they were about to fight but finally quieted down. They sat next to the moat.

It was now afternoon. The Wans still did not show up. Then night began to fall, but the Wans were still nowhere to be seen. Many people began to curse profanities out loud. All of Wan Zhenshan’s ancestors were abused roundly, especially Wan Zhenshan’s grandmother.

The sky was getting dark now, a scholarly person held a piece of paper and an ink case and a pen. He shook his head as he copied down the numbers written on the city wall. A big person was so bored that he did not have any place to vent his anger, he came forward and scolded: “What are you copying down the numbers for?”

The scholar said: “I will naturally have my own use for it, others need not care.”

The big man said: “Will you tell me or not? If you don’t speak up, I will hit you.” He raised his large fist and swayed it back and forth around the tip of the scholar’s nose. The scholar was afraid and said: “Alright... alright... someone told me to copy it down.”

The big man said: “Who told you to copy it down?”

The scholar said: “This old fellow, I do not dare to deceive you, this person is the renowned and venerable Wan Zhenshan, you... you cannot offend this elder.”

As soon as the name “Wan Zhenshan” was uttered, there was much hubbub from the crowd. Di Yun was also delighted, but amidst his delight, most of his emotions consisted of enmity and grief.

This scholar trembled back and forth in front, one foot high and the other foot low, he staggered along his way and continued walking east. Over a hundred people followed closely behind. Since Wan Zhenshan did not show up, the only solution was to find Wan Zhenshan. He is the only man capable of figuring out the secret behind these numbers. The news of the secret had long spread across the city. Many people wanted to pressure Wan Zhenshan into leading them to the treasure. Many people complimented the big man: “It is fortunate that elder brother was so smart, otherwise we could have waited here for three days and three nights and Wan Zhenshan would have already taken the treasure for himself.”

The big man was very proud of himself and said: “That little fellow was sneaky and secretive, I knew that there was something up with him.” He talked as if he did a good deed for everyone.

Di Yun mixed himself with the rest of the crowd and thought: “Wan Zhenshan is an old and extremely cunning person, he would not be as careless as to let others find the secret. There must be some kind of scheme behind this.” At this point the group had already travelled several li away from the south gate. Di Yun turned his head to look and looked at the city wall, in a glimpse he saw a shadow rushing past the city wall heading westward.

Di Yun thought: “All of these people have their attention fixed on the scholar and won’t let him escape. If they find Wan Zhenshan, they won’t separate from him. In such a big city, it would be extremely difficult to find Wan Zhenshan and his son, but to find such a messy crowd would be as easy as flipping my hand, why do I have to merge myself with the crowd?”

He changed his thoughts and in a flash hid himself behind a tree. Then he exerted his lightness martial arts and turned around to head towards the south gate. He headed westward and followed the direction that the shadow went. He caught up to this person before the time it took to drink a cup of tea. Although this person’s lightness martial arts were decent, it paled in comparison to Di Yun’s. He did not even notice that he was being followed, he only kept on running.

Di Yun saw as this person made his way in front of a small house. The person went inside the house and Di Yun kept watch outside and waited for this person to come out. After a while, he saw through the window that a lamp was lit from inside the house.

He made his way under the window and peeked through the narrow window slit. He saw there was an old person sitting on a chair inside the house. This person had his back against the window so Di Yun could not make out who it was.

This old person took out and began reading a book on the table. Di Yun only took one glance and knew that it was the “Tang Poem Anthology”. In the past few days this book was incredibly popular in the city, evidently even an old person was unable to break the custom, he too had a copy. Di Yun watched as this old person took out a writing brush and on a piece of yellow paper wrote

words “Jiangling City, South”, then this person faintly counted the numbers “5, 10, 15, 16...” Then on the piece of paper he wrote the word “inclined”.

Di Yun was startled at what he saw. He thought: “There is actually someone capable of deciphering the numbers from the ‘Tang Poem Anthology’, could it be that he knows the Liancheng Swordplay?” But judging from the back of this person it was not Wan Zhenshan. This person wore very old and shabby gray clothes, Di Yun could not figure out who it was.

Di Yun watched as this person continued to read the book, counting on his fingers the number of words every now and then, and then writing down the corresponding word. This person wrote down 26 words in total, Di Yun read the words one by one:

*“Inclined West, Tianing Temple, Main Hall, Buddha Statue Facing the Pious and Sincere Worshipper. The Praying Spirit Informs Buddha Will Bless a Future Life of Bliss”.*

The old person became very angry and slammed the brush hard on the table. “What ‘Facing the Pious and Sincere Worshipper, the Praying Spirit Informs’ and what ‘Buddha Will Bless a Future Life of Bliss’! Damn it! ‘Future Life of Bliss’, are they telling me to see to go see Yama<sup>2</sup> or what?”

As Di Yun listened he felt that this person’s voice was quite familiar. He was just thinking who it could be when this person turned around to face the window. Di Yun ducked under the window and thought: “It is second uncle, no wonder he knows the sword stances. But what is the secret then? It seems to be nothing more than a joke.” He could not help but chuckle in his heart. “So many people spent so much effort, they were willing to kill their teachers, kill each other, and in the end, it is nothing more than a phrase meant to make a fool of you.”

He did not actually laugh out loud, but inside the room Yan Daping began to laugh. “Haha! This phrase is telling me to sincerely worship Buddha, then that damn filthy clay statue will bless me and wish me a future life of bliss. Haha! Damn it! It’s telling me to live a future life of bliss. The three of us combined our forces to kill our teacher, the three of us martial brothers engaged in a fierce rivalry all these years, and we were fighting for nothing more than a ‘future life of bliss’. The hundreds of heroes and courageous people in Jiangling City, the various turtle thieves and bandits, all of them have tried to take this manual, and it was all for nothing more than a ‘future life of bliss’, haha! Haha!” His laughter was filled with sadness and grief. As he laughed, he tore the yellow paper to shreds.

All of a sudden he stood there motionless, his gaze completely fixed outside the window.

Di Yun thought about his own misfortunes. He thought about Qi Fang’s tragic death and how it was all because of this secret. But in the end this secret was nothing more several phrases of a big joke. Under such extreme grief and indignation, he could not help but start laughing out loud.

At the same time, he saw Yan Daping fixed his gaze outside the window, as if he was staring at something. Di Yun heard him mumble to himself, “Now that it has come to this, might as well go to Tianing Temple and take a look, what harm can it do? Jiangling City, South... this is correct, there is

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<sup>2</sup> Yama is the King of Hell in Chinese mythology.

indeed an old temple there.” He brandished his hand to extinguish the candlelight. He pushed open the door and executed his lightness martial arts to travel westward.

Di Yun became hesitant in his heart. “Should I look for Wan Zhenshan or follow Uncle Yan? Ai, such a big group of people can’t be hard to find. I should go after Uncle Yan first.” At once he looked at Yan Daping and followed closely behind.

It did not take a full hour before Yan Daping reached the outskirts of the old Tianning Temple. He first stayed outside the temple for a very long time to listen for any activity, then he toured once around the outside. He realized that the temple was completely empty before he pushed the door open to go inside.

This Tianning Temple was located in a very desolate area and had been abandoned and worn down over the years. There were no acolytes or monks inside this temple. Yan Daping reached the main hall and lit up a torch, he wanted to light the candle in front of the altar. Under the firelight, it appeared that the candle wax was somewhat fresh. His thoughts changed and he extended his hands to pinch the wax, indeed it was still soft and mushy. It was obvious that someone lit this very candle not too long ago. He became suspicious and blew out his torch. He was about to go outside to investigate when suddenly he felt a pain on his back, a sharp blade was plugged in through his back. He let out a loud screech and lost his life immediately.

Di Yun hid behind the double doors. He only saw that the flame was extinguished and Yan Daping let out a miserable screech. Di Yun realized that Yan Daping had met with an unfortunate accident. All of this happened so fast that Di Yun did not have time to come to his rescue. Di Yun remained where he was, unmoving; he wanted to see who it was who killed Yan Daping. In the darkness, all he could make out were the sounds of faint cold laughs. When the voice of this person reached his ears, Di Yun was absolutely horrified. This voice was gloomy and extremely frightening, but it was also extremely familiar.

All of a sudden, a fire was set ablaze. Someone had lit up the candle. The candlelight reflected directly on the body of this person. This person slowly turned his head to face the front. Di Yun narrow blurted out, “Teacher!”

This person was indeed Qi Zhangfa. Di Yun watched as his teacher gave a hard kick at the body of Yan Daping. Then he took out the long sword from his back and stabbed this body from behind several times in succession.

When Di Yun saw how cruel and vicious Qi Zhangfa could be towards his own martial brother, the word “teacher” reached the tip of his mouth, but was immediately swallowed back in.

Qi Zhangfa laughed coldly and said: “Martial brother, it looks like you have also found the secret of the Liancheng Manual, am I right? Haha! ‘Inclined West, Tianing Temple, Main Hall, Buddha Statue Facing the Pious and Sincere Worshipper. The Praying Spirit Informs’. Haha! Martial brother, the sword manual says ‘Buddha Will Bless a Future Life of Bliss’, are you not heading to your afterlife now? Was this not blessed by Buddha?”

He turned his head to face the appearance of the benevolent Buddha statue, his face full of violent rage, very fiercely he scrutinized: “Damn it! You sorry excuse of a stinking Buddha have capered



your daddy I for my entire life, you have caused me so much suffering!" He leapt on top of the altar and raised his long sword. *Ting! Ting! Ting!* He slashed the belly of the statue three times.

This Buddha statue was made from clay and engraved in wood, yet when these three slashes stroke firmly on the statue, it emitted a clang of metals like the sound of gold clashing. Qi Zhangfa became very suspicious and slashed the statue two more times. He only felt the more he slashed the statue the tougher the substance became. He took the candle and looked closer at the statue. He saw that the sword slashes left a deep scar in the statue, the scars glittered a brilliant golden light. Qi Zhangfa was shocked. He extended his fingers to reach for the two sword scars and peeled off the nearby clay. What he saw was sparkling gold, the inside of the statue was actually completely made of gold. He could not help but yell out, "Golden Buddha! It is all gold! It is all gold!"

This Buddha statue stood over 30 feet tall, it was very thick and solid and definitely exceeded any ordinary Buddha statue. If it was true that the entire statue was made of gold, there would be at least fifty or sixty thousand catties worth of gold, would that not be a great treasure or what?

Under great ecstasy, Qi Zhangfa pondered for a bit and then turned the statue around. He raised his sword and began hacking at the statue, he saw that the waist area of the statue had a very small hidden contraption. He repeatedly hacked away at this contraption, the clay flying in all directions. He made over a dozen cuts on the statue before he completely cleared up the clay surrounding the contraption. He saw that this contraption was also made of gold. Qi Zhangfa extended the tip of his sword to pry it open. He was unable to contain his joy, his heart rate was off the charts. He got so excited that his sword unexpectedly broke in half.

He picked up the remaining half of the sword and continued to pry open the hidden contraption from another side. After several attempts, the contraption gradually began to loosen itself. Qi Zhangfa threw away his long sword and extended his finger to lightly open it. He illuminated the insides of the statue with the candle and saw that inside the stomach of the Buddha was filled with the glowing aura of sparkling gems piled up in grandiosity. He could not even figure out how many gems and other treasures were stuffed inside this Buddha.

Qi Zhangfa spat out some saliva. He was about to extend his hand inward to reach for the various gems to take a look, when suddenly he felt the altar slightly tremble. He knew there was something going on and dropped back down on the ground. As soon as his left foot reached the ground, he felt a faint pain on his lower stomach, someone had already sealed his acupoint. With a loud crash he fell on the ground.

Someone came out from under the altar who laughed coldly. "Brother Qi, you have finally found it. Since Old Second found this place, why didn't you consider that your eldest martial brother would find it too?" The speaker was none other than Wan Zhenshan.

When Qi Zhangfa unexpectedly discovered this great treasure, no matter how intelligent and crafty of a person he was, when he saw so many precious gems in front of him, he was completely overjoyed with his discovery. Now that his mind was back to reality he figured he should have known that Wan Zhenshan would indeed have come here. He toughly said: "The first time you failed to kill me, who would have thought that I would end up dead by your hands after all."

Wan Zhenshan was complacent and said: "I was very perplexed about this too. Brother Qi, I know I strangled you to death and stuffed you inside the wall, how did you come back to life?"

Qi Zhangfa closed his eyes and did not answer.

Wan Zhenshan said: “Even if you don’t answer, you think I don’t know the answer? Back then you weren’t my match, so you sealed your own breathing and faked your death. After you were sealed inside the wall you were still able to make your way out! Excellent! Impressive! Back then when I saw there was a piece of brick sticking out of the sealed wall, I knew that something wasn’t right, but I would never have guessed that it was the result of you breaking yourself out of the wall.”

Ever since Wan Zhenshan sealed Qi Zhangfa inside the wall, the next day he saw one of the bricks was sticking out, that incident had made his heart ill-at-ease ever since. It went so far as to give him somnambulism and he would be building walls in the middle of the night during his dreams. All along he was afraid that Qi Zhangfa became a “zombie” and would jump out of the wall. That’s why even in his sleep, every single night he would build the same wall over and over again, he wanted to seal the wall completely.

Wan Zhenshan laughed coldly. “Haha, you are really impressive. You looked on helplessly as your daughter became my son’s wife, yet you never revealed yourself. I ask you, what is it all for? Why?”

Qi Zhangfa spat out some phlegm in his direction.

Wan Zhenshan slanted his body to evade the spit. He laughed: “Old Third, would you rather die an easy death or have me cut you piece by piece? If you want to die an easy death, then tell me, how were you able to take out the sword manual from the inn. How were Old Second and I unable to find it after all these years?”

Qi Zhangfa felt a chill and said: “Do you think it was easy? That night I waited until the two of you were asleep like a pig, then I quietly got up and opened the box. I took out the sword manual and put it inside the interval between the drawer and the table. The next day, the sword manual naturally disappeared without a trace. The three of us bickered with each other for a very long time and then went our separate ways. You followed Yan Daping, Yan Daping followed me, and I followed you. The three of us tailed each other for over a month before going our separate ways. Then I returned to the inn and took out the sword manual from the hidden compartment. I returned home and put the manual inside a box of old clothes. But for some reason my daughter took the manual. You surnamed Wan, just end my life quickly!”

Wan Zhenshan laughed maliciously and said: “Very well, I will give you a quick death. Logically, I should not let you go so easily, but your martial brother I do not have any time to waste. I must use some dirt and seal up the Buddha statue again. Very well then my martial brother, it is time for you to move on!” He raised his sword and was about to strike down at Qi Zhangfa’s chest.

All of a sudden a red light flashed across the scene, Wan Zhenshan’s right arm was completely sliced off from his elbow and along with the sword all fell on the ground. Then his body was kicked away violently. It was Di Yun wielding the blood sabre to rescue Qi Zhangfa.

He lowered his body and unsealed the acupoint on Qi Zhangfa’s body and said: “Teacher, you have been startled!”

All of this happened so fast; Qi Zhangfa was completely dumbstruck for a long time before he could clearly see that this person was Di Yun. He said: "Yun... Yun'er, is it you?"

Di Yun and his teacher had been separated for such a long time. When he once again heard someone call him "Yun'er" he could not help but begin to grieve and said: "Yes, teacher, it is Yun'er."

Qi Zhangfa said: "So you have seen everything."

Di Yun nodded his head. Then he said: "Martial sister, martial sister... she... she..."

Wan Zhenshan lost one of his arms, he struggled to pick himself up and then began to rush out of the temple. Qi Zhangfa rushed ahead of him and stabbed Wan Zhenshan squarely from behind and it pierced completely through his heart. Wan Zhenshan let out a painful cry and died immediately.

Qi Zhangfa looked at the dead bodies of his two martial brothers and slowly said: "Yun'er, fortunately you arrived just in time and saved your teacher's life. Hey, who else is here? Is that Fang'er?" As he said this he pointed his finger to the side of the hall.

When Di Yun heard the words "Fang'er" his heart trembled violently. He turned around to look but there was nobody there. He was surprised when suddenly he felt a sharp pain from his back. He flipped his hand over to grab his enemy by the wrist. He turned around and saw that this person was holding a very sharp and dazzling dagger. It was none other than his teacher Qi Zhangfa.

Di Yun was perplexed. "Tea... teacher... what crime did your disciple commit that you would want to kill me?" He saw that this dagger had already stabbed him firmly from behind, but because he had the protection of the dark silkworm vest, he did not lose his life.

Qi Zhangfa was seized by the wrist and half his body became numb, he could not even exert the slightest bit of strength. Under such alarm and anger he said fiercely, "Very well, you have learned a set of profound martial arts, naturally you no longer take your teacher seriously anymore. Kill me then. Kill me! Kill me! Why haven't you killed me yet?"

Di Yun released his hold but he was still at a loss for words. "How would I dare to kill my own teacher?"

Qi Zhangfa shouted: "Why are you so insincerely courteous? This Buddha statue is filled with gold and precious gemstones, do you not want it all for yourself? If I don't kill you, then you will kill me. What is so strange about that? This is a remarkable Gold Buddha, inside its stomach are invaluable gemstones and jewels, why won't you kill me? Why won't you kill me?" The way he shouted so hoarsely, his voice was filled with greed, anger, and lament. This voice did not even sound like the voice of a human, it sounded like the voice of a wounded beast howling in the wilderness.

Di Yun shook his head and retreated a few steps. "Teacher wants to kill me because of this Gold Buddha?" Then in an instant he came to a startling realization. He understood everything: Qi Zhangfa was willing to go so far as to kill his own teacher, his own martial brothers, he was even suspicious of his own daughter, what does a mere disciple mean to him? In his heart he suddenly recalled what Ding Dian once told him: *"His nickname is 'Iron Lock Across the River', what isn't he capable of doing?"*

Di Yun retreated another step and said: “Teacher, I have no intention of taking away any part of your Gold Buddha, you can take it all for yourself.”

Di Yun really did not understand, how could a person in this world actually care for nothing but riches? This person did not care for his teacher, he did not care for his martial brothers or his disciples—he did not even care for his own daughter. Even if he possessed such a priceless treasure, what does it really mean in the end?

Qi Zhangfa did not even believe his own ears and thought: “In this world there is actually someone who is not moved by so many precious gems and jewels? This little brat Di Yun must have some other sort of scheme up his sleeves.” At this point he had already completely lost his cool and shouted: “What trick are you pulling now? This here is a gigantic Gold Buddha, its stomach is completely filled with pearls and gemstones, why do you not want it? What scheme are you trying to pull?”

Di Yun shook his head. He was just about to exit the temple when suddenly he heard the sounds of a lot of footsteps fast approaching. There were lots of people entering the temple. Di Yun jumped up to the roof and looked outside. He saw over a hundred people holding torches shouting with much hubbub, they were all heading towards the temple. It was the group of realm folks from earlier.

He heard someone shout: “Wan Gui, damn it! Let’s go! Let’s go!”

Di Yun wanted to leave, but as soon as he heard the name “Wan Gui” he stopped himself. He still had yet to avenge Qi Fang.

The crowd of people stormed and fought their way into the temple. Di Yun watched very carefully; Wan Gui was captured by several big fellows and was beaten to a pulp, his nose was swollen and his eyes were darkly bruised. But he was still wearing a very scholarly outfit. It turns out that he was the one who dressed up as a scholar in order to lure away the group of people crowding around the city wall so as to let his father go to Tianning Temple and take the treasure for himself. But under the constant interrogation of the crowd he finally revealed his tracks. The crowd of people beat him to a pulp and threatened to kill him if he did not lead them to Tianning Temple.

Qi Zhangfa heard that people were approaching and urgently jumped up the altar. He wanted to cover up the sword markings on the statue that revealed the various hidden gemstones but he was too late, the crowd had already seen him standing on the altar and hugging the Gold Buddha’s big stomach with both hands. At once under the illumination of several dozen torches, the temple was as bright as day. Everyone saw the dazzling reflection of gold and let out a roar as they rushed forward. Everyone rushed forward in a complete mess and cut off all the clay from the statue. Everyone had their own sabre or sword and slashed mindlessly, in no time at all the statue was completely naked and emitted a radiant gold light.

Then followed that someone discovered the hidden contraption in the statue and extended his hand to reach for it, fishing out large quantities of precious gemstones. The ones that were standing at the back used their strength to push this person aside, the various gemstones were taken out large quantities at a time. The stronger people stole the gemstones from the weaker people.

All of a sudden, from outside a bugle horn sounded repeatedly and the door of the temple was kicked open; over a dozen soldiers rushed inside and shouted: “The prefectural magistrate is here!

Nobody make a move!” From behind someone in an officer’s outfit proudly walked inside, it was none other than the prefectural magistrate of Jiangling, Ling Tuisi. He had many followers outside the city and several were in the group of people that came to the temple. As soon as he heard the news, he immediately dispatched soldiers and rushed to the scene.

Ling Tuisi caused the death of Ding Dian and even forced his own daughter’s death, yet he did not have a single clue about the mysteries of the sword manual. But nonetheless his desires for the great treasure never decreased. He knew that it was definitely related to Mei Niansheng, only he did not know that the crux of the secret lied within the ‘Tang Poem Swordplay’. He continued to part with large quantities of bribes and continued to serve his term as the prefectural magistrate of Jingzhou. In addition, using his position as the leader of the Raspy Dragon Sect, he dispatched many of his sect followers to search. Eventually he found news that the ‘A Deadly Secret’ had to do with the ‘Tang Poem Anthology’.

Ling Tuisi came from a background of academics and imperial secretaries, his education and literature was remarkably impressive. As soon as he looked at the Tang Poem Anthology he found out that this poem was written by late Tang poets that lived sometime during the reign of Emperor Liangyuan around 500 to 600 A.D. Emperor Liangyuan’s treasure could definitely not have evidence that could be found inside the ‘Tang Poem Anthology’, so he further investigated thoroughly. Then he figured out that after Emperor Liangyuan concealed the treasure, he completely eradicated all of the soldiers who ever came in contact with this treasure. Later he was killed by soldiers of the Northern Zhou Dynasty, and from then on the location of the treasure was unknown.

It wasn’t until the reign of Kangxi that a senior monk with supreme martial arts stayed in the Tianning Temple in Jingzhou and accidentally discovered the treasure. He wanted to give it to the Heaven and Earth Society in their quest to destroy Qing and restore the Ming Dynasty. But he was afraid that the secret would leak out, so he encoded the location of the treasure into a set of numbers located in a bunch of sword mnemonics, then he put it inside the popular ‘Tang Poem Anthology’. Then he gave it to Wu Liuqi, who was a disciple of his elder martial brother from the same clan. Just like the senior monk, Wu Liuqi also knew the ‘Tang Poem Swordplay’ and knew the sequence of stances in this swordplay. Unfortunately, when he was about to pass on the secret code, he met with an accident and was killed. From then on the secret code of the sword mnemonics leaked outside<sup>3</sup>.

From then on the information passed around outwards, but the information did not connect the treasure to the ‘Tang Poem Anthology’, so it was useless. The ones who knew of this information did not know the Tang Poem Swordplay. Although they knew the mnemonics of the swordplay, they did not know the sequence of the stances, so they had no way of finding the treasure.

Mei Niansheng belonged to the same clan as Wu Liuqi and the senior monk. Naturally he knew the Tang Poem Swordplay. Later on he received the sword mnemonics, but the news leaked and he suffered at the hands of his three traitorous disciples.

Now that the various realm folk saw so many treasures in front of them, how would they be afraid of the authorities? Everyone exerted all their efforts to steal the gemstones in front of them.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information about Wu Liuqi, read <The Deer and the Cauldron>.

## Chapter 12 – Liancheng Treasure

Various pearls, gemstones, white jades, green jades fell on the ground. All of the heroic people of the realm and soldiers all reached to grab the treasure at all costs. Some began to fight each other, others even jumped on the Gold Buddha...

How would Ling Tuisi's subordinates not fight for the treasure? The soldiers bent their bodies to pick up the treasures, and the officials too took the treasures. Nobody dared to fall behind and lose out on anything. Qi Zhangfa was plundering the treasures, Wan Gui was fighting over the treasures, even the great magistrate Ling Tuisi could not resist and stuffed handfuls of treasures into his bosom.

To fight for the treasures in such a way, fights and casualties could not be avoided. Some people managed to win their fights, some people bled, some people died...

The fights became more and more intense. Some people even pounced themselves on the Gold Buddha and began biting at it, some people rammed their heads against the statue.

Di Yun was extremely perplexed. "What's going on? Even if they love these treasures so much, they should not go so far as to be this crazy?"

Indeed, all of them had lost their minds. Their eyes became red; they were fighting mindlessly and biting mindlessly, scratching mindlessly. Di Yun saw that 'Twin Knights of Bell Sword' Wang Xiaofeng was amongst the group, as was the remaining member of 'Luohua Liushui', Hua Tiegan. They had all become crazy as wild beasts, they were all clawing and biting frantically. They put the various precious stones in their mouths.

Di Yun understood the truth. "There must have been extremely deadly poison smeared on these jewels. Back then the emperor who concealed the treasure was afraid that soldiers of the Zhou Dynasty would come and take it away, so he smeared poison on these jewels." He wanted to save his teacher, but it was too late.

After these people contracted the poison, they were suffering endlessly and would not live long. Ling Tuisi, Wan Gui, Lu Kun, Bu Yuan, Shen Cheng and the others had committed endless atrocities. Now that they finally got their hands on the treasure, there was no need for Di Yun to finish them off. They would not live for much longer.

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Di Yun went back to Ding Dian and Lady Ling's grave and brought with him several hundred varieties of flowers. He did not hire anyone to help him out, he did everything by himself. He grew up in the countryside as a farmer, naturally he specialized in digging. The only problem was that he was not very knowledgeable about flowers, what he usually grew consisted of hot peppers, cucumbers, winter melons, cabbages, eggplants, water spinaches...

He left Jingzhou and took Water Spinach with him. He took a horse and set forth on a long journey. He no longer cared about the various events of the realm. He only wanted to find a place where nobody would find him and raise Water Spinach into an adult.

He returned to the snowy valley.

Qi Fang gave him a hundred taels of silver back in the Wan residence. This money not only served to help tidy up the tomb of Ding Dian and Lady Ling, it also served as expenses to the family who took care of Water Spinach during his absence, and also served to pay out the expenses of food and resting along his journey. He bought some new clothes and shoes for Water Spinach. He also bought some cotton-padded clothes and trousers and over a dozen straw sandals for himself. He stuffed it all into a big bundle and carried it on his back. By the time he reached the snowy valley near Sichuan, he only had about thirty taels of silver left on him.

He weighed the remaining silver in his hands and then exerted his strength to throw it far away, casting it into the deep canyon near the side of the road. "Even if I have a million taels of silver, even if I have an exorbitant amount of precious treasures, what use would it be in a snowy valley?"

But his martial sister did not come with him. She would never ever come with him. He could not even see her one more time. He felt very lonely and desolate.

"Uncle, Uncle, why are you crying? Do you miss my mama? We promised each other that neither of us are allowed to cry anymore!"

The snow began to pour down from the sky again, making its way to the cave he once resided.

All of a sudden, from afar he saw a young girl standing outside the cave.

It was Shui Sheng!

Her face full of delight, she rushed forward, laughing and calling, "I have waited a long time! I knew you would eventually return. If you don't come back, I will wait ten years. If you don't come back in ten years, I will search across the realm for a hundred years!"

**The End**

## Afterword

In my youth, back in my home at Haining county in Zhejiang province there was a servant by the name of He Sheng. He was a hunchback that tended to tilt to the right, giving off an oddly appearance. Although I am calling him a servant, he was not responsible for any heavy duty work. He only swept floors, cleaned off dust, and took the kids to school. When my brother's classmates would see him they would sing: "He Sheng He Sheng half hunchback, call him three times he will get angry, call him another three times he will turn a somersault, when he flips over he looks like a paralyzed basket. Paralyzed basket is a native slang from home which refers to rice baskets that have been broken.

At that time I only held He Sheng's hands and shouted at my brother's classmates to not sing. I even cried once as a result. As such, He Sheng was especially close to me. Even in the case of rainy or snowy days, he would still take me to school. Because he was a half hunchback, he could not carry me on his back, and he was already very old at the time. My parents urged him not to carry me for the fear that both of us would fall and hurt ourselves, but he insisted.

One day, he contrived a great sickness. I went to his room to give him some dim sum, and he told me about his life story:

He was a person from the Danyang county in Jiangsu province. His home operated a family business of tofu, and his parents helped him find a pretty lady from the neighbourhood as his wife. He had to save up money for a few years before he had enough to complete the marriage. In December of that year, the family man told him to grind the rice vermicelli used to make year cakes. This rich man in the family opened a pawn shop and a seasoning store, and his home had a big garden. Whether it be grinding tofu or grinding rice vermicelli, both required similar amounts of effort. The rich man wanted the rice to be finished grinding by New Year's. The work of grinding was done in the back section of the rich man's house. I have seen people grind vermicelli before. They would grind for a few days, and there would already be a circle of dull footprints to be seen around the mill from the grinder. The social customs around Jiangnan was pretty similar throughout, so I understood as soon as he said it.

Because he was in a hurry to finish, he would have to work until 10 or 11PM. One day after he was finished work, it was already very late and he was about to go home when suddenly several people from the rich man's family shouted: "There's a thief!" and ordered people to capture the thief in the garden. He ran into the garden and was beaten with a stick by several people who called him a thief. There were quite a few people beating him with a stick causing him to bruise up severely and even broke his ribs. That was how his half hunchback was caused. He took several strokes to the head and fell unconscious. When he woke up, there were many good and silver jewelleries that they said they found on his body. And someone also found copper coins and gold hidden in the rice basket so they took him to the government office. As the spoils were there, he could not deny his accusations, and was hit with several dozen strokes before being sent off to prison.

Originally, even if he was accused as a thief, it would not be any sort of unforgivable crime, likely to be kept in prison for two years and then released. During this time, his father and mother both died of shock, and his unwed wife married the son of the rich man.



After he was released from prison he realized that he was framed by the rich man's son. One day, they came across each other on the street, and he took out a sharp knife that he hid in his pocket and stabbed the man. However, he could not escape and was once again arrested. That man suffered serious injuries but he did not die. But his father consistently contacted various officials and gaolers, intending to murder him inside prison for the fear that he would seek revenge once he was released.

He said: "It is really a blessing from Bodhisattva, within a year, Master became a high ranking official in the office of Danyang county. His greatness saved my life."

Who he referred to as his master was actually my grandfather.

My grandfather was Wen Qing (originally his surname was "Mei", but when he went to school and during exams he used "Wen Qing" as his name), his knowledge of literature was vast as coral, back in his hometown the elders would call him "Mr. Vast Coral". He graduated middle school during the twenty-second year of the reign of Qing emperor Guangxu and continued his service examination in the middle of the twenty-third year. He was sent to Danyang to become a magistrate. He had strong achievements as a county magistrate and moved up in rank. Not long after, the incident called "Danyang Religious Case" occurred.

The fifth scroll of Mr. Deng Zicheng's "Two Thousand Years of Chinese History" mentions this incident:

"The Treaty of Tianjin permitted foreigners to preach, hence many religious people spread all over China. Vicious people joined religions, and treated foreigners as protection from the functionary of the government. The people hated the arrogance of the preachers, and also claimed that this operation was sly and there was much speculation causing much dispute and controversy. There were many casualties amongst local preachers, and the foreign preachers made the excuse to threaten them, extort a huge sum of money, and even blamed the officials. They threatened the Qing court to punish harshly, the regional general removed them from their positions and can never come again. The internal affairs was meddled, and the country was no longer a country.

"Danyang Religious Case". In August of the seventeenth year of the reign of Guangxu, Liu Kunyi made a resolute. That year in Jiangsu, the counties Danyang, Jingui, Wuxi, Yanghu, Jiangyin, and Rugao each had a church and were each burnt down in succession. People were sent to investigate this case in Jiangsu. Danyang was first to be investigated, and the screening of Wen Qing caused him to be expelled..." (The Guangxu Records, p. 105)

Before my grandfather was expelled, he tried to appeal the decision. His superior told him to behead the two criminals who set the churches on fire in public in order to satisfy the foreign preachers. However, my grandfather sympathized with the citizens who burnt down the churches and notified the two criminals to escape. Then he explained to his superior that this incident was caused by foreign churchmen bullying our good citizens which caused public anger. Several hundred people rushed at once to burn down the churches, there was no leader in this act. Following this, he was formally removed from his position.

Later, my grandfather went back to his hometown to study and write poems. He provided many services to the public. He wrote a "Haining Cha Clan Poem Compilation" which consisted of several hundred scrolls, but he passed away before it was completed (This copy was placed in two houses

and later became the entertainment of me and my cousins). At the time of the funeral, Danyang sent a dozen or more priests to provide libation. The two men who were responsible for the burning down of churches attended and were crying. According to my uncle and my father, the two of them went from Danyang to my hometown, and every half a kilometer they would give a respectful kowtow. Even today I am suspicious of this statement, let alone during the time of my childhood. However, those two men were indeed very grateful, so it's not out of the question that they did these kowtows for the last several kilometers of the journey.

A while back I went to Taiwan and saw my older cousin Mr. Jiang Fucong. He was the head of the National Palace Museum and he used to be classmates with my second uncle back in Beijing University. He mentioned to me the deeds of my grandfather and praised him greatly. Had he not told me I would not have known this.

He Sheng said that after my grandfather became the magistrate of Danyang, he reinvestigated the cases of every prisoner and realized that He Sheng was innocent. However, the incident of him stabbing the rich man's son was completely true and could not be denied, hence he could not be released. After my grandfather resigned from his position to return home he brought He Sheng with him and raised him in my family.

He Sheng did not pass away until the war began. My father and mother would not mention his deeds to anyone. When He Sheng spoke to me he thought that he would not recover from his illness, so he did not instruct me not to release this information.

This incident has always been stuck in my heart. "A Deadly Secret" was developed from this real life story to serve as a memory of an elder that was very near and dear to me in my childhood. What He Sheng's surname was, I never knew; He Sheng was not his real name. Obviously, he did not know any martial arts. I only remember that he would often not speak for one or two days. My parents treated him with much generosity and respect and never ordered him to do anything.

This novel was written in 1963. At that time, Ming Pao newspaper and Singapore's Nanyang Business Paper cooperated to do a weekly publication called "Southeast Asia Weekly". This novel was written for that newspaper. This novel was originally entitled "Su Xin Jian<sup>1</sup>".

Jin Yong  
-April 1977

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<sup>1</sup> The title is "素心劍", literal translation "Pure Heart Sword".